

ART AND UNDERSTANDING

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ART AND UNDERSTANDING
by Neil Reid

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Abstract.

The essay explores topics related to the objectivity and rationality of aesthetics. Initially, the nature of objectivity is considered. The question is raised: what is it for something to be objective?. Various metaphysical objections to the view that value is an objective feature of the world are considered. These include the idea that what truly exists is coincident with that which is subject-independent; that will and cognition are distinct autonomous mental faculties; that value is, epistemologically, a 'queer' commodity the experience of which is qualitatively distinct from sense-experience. Thereafter, aesthetic concepts are investigated more closely. The idea that the meaning of an expression is secured by a definition is challenged. It is argued that the practical impossibility of defining aesthetic terms does not preclude their having a precise meaning in discussion. In particular, the view that understanding is a mental process involving the grasp of something like a definition is criticized. The idea that the sense of a concept is, like the notes of music, influenced by its whole context is introduced. Aesthetic concepts, it is argued, are governed by conditions no less than concepts such as 'intelligent', 'resourceful', and the like. Finally, the view that aesthetic value, being a disposition of the will, is cognitively ungoverned is investigated. It is concluded that in so far as the disposition of the will is sensitive to, i.e., can be modified by, means that deserve, in virtue of their wide currency, to be counted rational the will is cognitively constrained.

Introduction.

This essay explores what grounds there are for attributing rationality to aesthetic activity. There may be no demonstrative proofs in aesthetics - it may not be possible to *prove* Beethoven greater than Bach in the way in which it is possible to prove the value of Avogadro's number - but that is not to say that that discussions of aesthetic merit and demerit are spurious or arbitrary. If instances of rationality were confined to mathematics and the physical sciences there would be precious little rationality in ordinary life.

A number of metaphors occur to me which express both what I hope to achieve and the procedure by means of which I hope to achieve it. The first presents a picture of aesthetics isolated, sinking in heavy seas, throwing out hooks and mooring ropes to various other activities. Thus if aesthetics goes down under a philosophical attack so too does this and that area of rational activity. Another metaphor is also one which pictures aesthetics 'coming in from the cold': aesthetics again isolated, like a single sheep, and vulnerable to attack; but brought in to the fold of rational activities, there to survive or perish with the rest. In other words, I hope to so to speak 'spread the risk', demonstrating that aesthetics is not singular in its vulnerability to certain lines of thought. I hope the effect of this will be to make the sceptic think twice about the worth of his arguments - for almost

certainly these arguments will cast a doubt more far-reaching than ought to be countenanced with equanimity'.

The aim of this essay, then, is to show aesthetic discussion/activity to be a relative of other rational pursuits, founded upon no more or less than other rational activities, woven so to speak into the fabric of rationality itself.

A number of views, more or less well-defined and explicit, conspire to create a climate which is, if not openly hostile to aesthetics, unsympathetic: it is a climate that makes the subject easy to dismiss or ignore. And, clearly, bringing aesthetics into the fold in the way that I describe requires that theories which seek to isolate it ought to be scrutinized most closely. One view in particular leads to the marginalization of aesthetics, namely, the idea of the needle-thin aesthetic agent. Under this rubric may be listed a number of iniquitous views. The needle-thin agent is the agent whose acts (typically judgements, or judgement-expressing actions) are self-contained, isolated from other interests...The aesthetic agent is often characterized thus, as though the act of judgement were an insular happening, quite without context or supporting considerations. On such a view it is difficult to see where the aesthetic judgements gets its light from, i.e., what informs it, supports it, counts for or against it, etc.

One argument to which I am drawn, and which figures in this essay, is the view that an aesthetic judgement, if it is well-

considered, reflects the state of the will generally, or that the state of the will as a whole finds expression in the well-considered judgement. Thus the judgement has the support of the whole motivational structure of the person: it is *in line with* all his other judgements, and bears a logical relation to them. To say, then, that a particular judgement cannot be rationally defended is to say that no such judgement can be rationally defended, and that the disposition of the will as a whole cannot be counted a part of, or an expression of, rationality. For it will be argued that all judgements, all dispositions of the will, rest upon a non-rational foundation. Thus, however much the judgements of a person form a logically coherent whole the particular judgements are still spurious in virtue of the fact that the whole is spurious - just as nothing on the earth is stationary if the earth is moving through space.

The structure of the essay may be outlined as follows.

The first chapter deals with the metaphysics of aesthetic value, and tackles the question whether aesthetic values exist and if so how they might be located in a general philosophical picture. The second chapter continues on the metaphysical theme, before moving on to a more particular discussion of aesthetic terms, aesthetic argument, the role of emotion in aesthetic appraisal, and so forth. The third chapter explores the idea that the value of aesthetic experience is related to the overall value that a person places on activities in life, i.e., that aesthetic judgements are

not the product of an isolated faculty or curiously detached way of seeing, but that they are an outgrowth of the rationality of the individual.

The first section of the first chapter questions the assumption that what really exists is what is objective in the sense that it is not dependent upon any particular point of view. The identification of the real with the non-local imperils value because value may be analysed as a disposition of the human will. Access may only be gained to value through the specifically human point of view.

The second section of the first chapter looks at a theory of man that is ancillary to this objectivist/absolutist metaphysics. The compartmentalization of the human psyche that is a common feature of this view is criticized.

Then, in the third section, a further support of this view is criticized, namely the idea that knowledge is accumulated through abstractions and generalizations from atomic sensations. Value, not being an atomic sensation, finds difficulty in squeezing into this picture. I suggest that the concepts that mark our basic sensations - 'red', 'sour', 'hot' - are not derived from raw sense-experience, and that they are applied to the world according to rules that derive from a human practice, rules which cannot be accessed from a point outwith the practice. And I suggest that the 'newly-humbled' concepts of sensation are now on the same plane as

aesthetic concepts. ('Newly-humbled' referring here to the fact that these concepts have been knocked from their privileged position in the empiricist epistemology.)

The second chapter is an attempt to investigate this last idea more fully. The problem that kicks off the second chapter is how, even if we are unsatisfied with a metaphysics that excludes value, we can find a place for value when we do not know what it is, cannot define it, cannot say what secures the meaning of an aesthetic concept. The idea that definitions are necessary to, or indicative of, rationality is considered, and the theory of understanding that underpins the demand for definitions is criticized. Following on from this the resemblance between concepts such as 'red' and aesthetic concepts is inspected from a little more close to. The way in which a concept that eludes easy definition may be employed along with other concepts in order to pick out very fine features of the world is discussed.

The second chapter seeks also to demonstrate that aesthetic concepts are subject to conditions. Just as it is not possible to call anything red it is not possible to call anything elegant. However, the idea emerges that 'elegant', unlike 'red', is value-loaded. It expresses, along with a description of an object, a certain disposition of the will towards the object. The way in which an object may be described may be governed by conditions but, so the argument goes, the disposition of the will is not. From a factual description any evaluation may follow. In the third

chapter I argue that this picture forces a questionable distinction between fact and value: it is not clear that an account of the facts is accessible independently of particular evaluations. Thus the idea of a substratum of fact over which value moves unconstrained is a misrepresentation of the true state of affairs.

Finally, the essay threads a path through hostile territory. The aim throughout is to proceed from one point to the next by the most direct route. This may result in a certain terseness, even a certain sketchiness. I believe, however, that the major obstacles will be considered. The essay attempts outline a stance on the issues, and to demonstrate that such a stance is at least feasible.

Chapter One.

This chapter takes the form of a three-pronged attack upon a version of non-cognitivism. No particular formulation of non-cognitivism is considered, but an 'identikit' version is assembled for investigation. The identikit version is characterized as the composite of three inter-related views. These are, first, the view that the world as it is in itself does not contain value; second, the view that the human psyche may usefully be divided into autonomous faculties - this division paralleling a metaphysical distinction between fact and value; third, the view that knowledge is derived from basic, simple atoms of sensation. On each of these issues the present chapter takes an antagonistic stance.

As I say, a number of conceptual relations may be discerned between these ideas. In some contexts they give one another logical support. In other contexts they amount to little more than different expressions of one metaphysical view. Thus, the tendency to compartmentalize the human mind (into the faculties of reason and desire, or cognition and will) complements the inclination to press home certain metaphysical distinctions, in particular that between fact and value. In other words the one is the counterpart - in a different dimension, to be sure - of the other (see, for example, John McDowell's assertion to this effect in *Is Morality a System of Hypothetical Imperatives?* PASSV. 1978). Or, again, the atomistic epistemology considered in the latter part of the chapter is ancillary to the metaphysics considered in the earlier part².

Even a cursory glance at the main features of the non-cognitivist account of aesthetic value is sufficient to reveal why these areas in particular require attention. Aesthetic value, it is argued, is not objective (in one sense of the term) since it is dependent upon the reactions of the human organism: value can be analysed as the disposition of an organism (consider Colin McGinn's formulation: "[A] dispositional thesis about value properties will hold that (e.g.) being good consists in a propensity on the part of good things to elicit in observers reactions of moral approval." (*The Subjective View*, p.147.)). This is hardly contestable. But coupled with the view that only what is objective in the sense that it is independent of a subject is real, value may appear to reside in the world only as a result of the mind's tendency to spread itself upon objects of attention. And this propensity to spread is not governed or licensed by the world as it is in itself. Therefore, value may only appear objective as the result of a kind of illusion, an error of judgement. The tendency to value is not licensed by any aspect of the world, and aesthetic distinctions do not pick out any feature of the world. This view is corroborated, supposedly, by the fact that value is an epistemologically fugitive quality, i.e., it seems logically complex and does not appear as a raw datum to any of the five senses³. Why do these views amount to a version of *non-cognitivism*? Roughly, the first says that value does not exist to be known. The second aligns value with will and, bringing about a separation of will from cognition, says that value is not properly

an object of *cognition*. The third view is supposed to account for why value is not easily enlisted amongst the items of cognition.

The important arguments, very briefly, are these. [1] If value is said not really to exist in the world - and this largely because it is tied to the human perception of things - then two consequences may be made out. The first is that on these grounds much must be jettisoned from the picture of reality along with value. And the question arises: Is this palatable? Is it coherent? Second, the enterprise of disclosing the real by moving farther and farther from the particular point of view of the individual man or the individual life-form threatens to yield a specious notion of objectivity, the metaphysical equivalent, it might be said, of the empty set. If what is real is what exists independently of specifically human representations then it is difficult to see how we can ever arrive at a properly-purged conception of the real. There is, also, an argument to the effect that an objective conception of the world neglects, necessarily, certain subjective aspects of the world. [2] If value is conceived as a misidentification of subjective impulses - i.e., desires - then an adequate account of desire is required in order that the major features of aesthetic activity may be rendered intelligible. This is not forthcoming if it is assumed that desire, or will, is non-cognitive. [3] Then there are familiar arguments against the view that knowledge is gained as the result of a process of generalization from atomic and unanalysable sensation. Perception, it may be argued, is conceptually-informed seeing. If the concepts

that we use to represent the world are not self-evident they must be founded upon something else, something other than sensation pure-and-simple. And if that is the case it is possible that aesthetic concepts may be grounded in the same manner, and so mark out distinctions in the world no less than concepts such as 'red' and 'sour' and the like. (There may be a difference in complexity but not a difference in kind.)

It is worth noting, finally, that the epistemological considerations that feature in the third section serve as the principal point upon which the discussion pivots from the considerations that occupy the first chapter to those that occupy the second. For the challenge to an empiricist epistemology contained in the third section brings to light the possibility that concepts such as those found in aesthetic discussions on the one hand (e.g., 'elegant', 'imposing', 'ironic') and concepts such as 'red' and 'sour' on the other, between which empiricism seeks to draw a firm distinction, derive their meaning from the same source, or are legitimized in the same way. That is to say that they both bear the same relation to 'raw' experience, and are applied in the same way, namely, in accordance with the established procedures of a community (rather than a system of rules secured by a happy and fortuitous agreement in private exemplars). And if this idea goes through then it is possible to see how aesthetic concepts may be brought into line with concepts of other kinds, from 'red' and 'sour' to 'intelligent' and 'innovative'. And it will be possible to give an account of what is at issue in aesthetic matters. And

it is precisely this difficulty - what aesthetic concepts mean, or refer to - that kicks off the second chapter. Thus the first chapter serves to open up a conceptual space and the second chapter seeks to fill it in a little.

I

I should like to begin with some scraps of common wisdom against which I shall be concerned to argue in this essay. It is not, however (and unfortunately), just scraps of common wisdom that shall be found in need of criticism. For standing in support of - or representing a more sophisticated expression of - the views against which I shall be arguing is a philosophical theory of considerable weight and proportions. So I shall be arguing against this theory as well.

The scraps of wisdom I have in mind are such as these: that beauty is in the eye of the beholder; that there is no accounting for taste; that art 'works' - i.e., achieves an effect - 'for you'; that the 'aesthetic agent' - the agent whose agency consists in making an aesthetic judgement - is, so to speak, needle-thin; that no-one ever really disputes about values; and so on. Two main points need to be made here. The first is that these views are not always distinct. Various conceptual connections may be made out between them. For example, the idea that there is no accounting for taste, i.e., the idea that it is not possible to justify an

aesthetic judgement (which is the idea that there is no such thing as aesthetic *knowledge*), gains support from the view that the aesthetic agent is, in Wittgenstein's phrase, 'an extensionless point': he is not substantial enough to get to grips with, and his characteristic action, the aesthetic judgement, as it were flashes into the world like lightning and disturbs nothing else⁴. On this view a man might be a beast and a boor in all things but one, which is that he writes music like Mozart⁵. The other point that needs to be made is that these views are presented here in a rough form initially. Ambiguities surround the concepts as I have introduced them. So at least part of what follows will be an attempt to sharpen the definition of these ideas, to say what lies behind them, and to investigate the coherence of any theory that may emerge in the process.

Having said that, this much, at any rate, may be observed with confidence (though it does not go very far): the common views variously express doubts about the *objectivity* of aesthetic value. They express doubts, that is, about whether aesthetic terms pick out features of the world, whether there is truth to be had in aesthetic matters, and how aesthetic knowledge is to be come by. When for example it is said that art either works for you or it doesn't, the implication is that art may be successful or not on a capricious individual basis (rather than successful or unsuccessful full stop). Expressions to do with the possibility - or impossibility - of aesthetic argument and justification emphasize the incorrigibility of the individual response. The individual

response is the criterion of the existence of an aesthetic quality (as it is the criterion of, say, the existence of a particular mental image). And the doubts about the contestability of judgement effectively cordon off the aesthetic response from rationality at large; the two pass one another by. These, then, are not statements of faith in the objectivity, justifiability, or rationality of aesthetic judgement.

What, on the face of it, might give rise to such scepticism? One thought, familiar from moral philosophy, takes its cue from the sheer volume of discussion and divergent opinion that the phenomena of art generate. This huge variety of interest suggests that artistic values are essentially contestable. No two people seem to share exactly the same tastes. And where objective enquiries like science show a united front and a common purpose, aesthetic enquiries present an unruly rabble. Aesthetic matters, therefore, must (it is claimed) be subjective and incapable of definitive solution. Only this could explain the fact that art supports without obvious contradiction such a multiplicity of antagonistic views. Yet it must be said that this diversity of opinion is not so great as might appear. Even Hume was led to observe that some judgements of aesthetic value amount to endorsing a 'palpable absurdity' - as though asserting the Atlantic to be no more than a puddle or a molehill to be equal to a Tenerife. And that there is some accounting to be done where taste is concerned is attested to by the very ample bodies of scholarship surrounding art-phenomena⁶. And again, that beauty is not in the eye of the beholder in the

same way that deliciousness is in the tongue of the taster is attested to by the human compulsion to discuss at length the one and not the other⁷. For unless we are in the grip of a philosophical theory we shall often argue the merits of this music over that or of this film over that with as much conviction as any matter of fact. Another sceptical thought takes its rise from the fact that it is difficult to see what really clinches an aesthetic dispute: justifications seem to give out rather easily in aesthetics. That is to say that arguments about beauty (and like concepts) lead, rather quickly, to an impasse. There comes a point where no adequate justification can be given for preferring one view (one judgement) over another. Still, the argument is hardly conclusive. For, as the success of philosophical scepticism shows, many of our beliefs and practices, when pressed, appear to suffer from a similar lack of foundation. A complete justification (of the sort the sceptic requires) of our matter of fact beliefs is no more to be had than a justification of an aesthetic preference. Moreover, it is simply untrue that there are no convincing arguments within aesthetic discussions. Sometimes the received wisdom of a generation of critics may be entirely overhauled as a result of cogent critical argument. And the existence of respected critics suggests that these men and women are distinguished by the relevance and the quality of their arguments⁸. One further source of scepticism (or is it an expression of scepticism) is the idea that aesthetic judgements really settle nothing. Whether something is beautiful or not depends upon whether someone is of the opinion that it is beautiful. There is no beauty apart from the experience

of beauty. To say, therefore, that something is beautiful is not to pick out a feature of the world. It is not to refer to an objective - that is publicly available - fact. As Colin McGinn puts it: "It is legitimate to enquire...whether the world is so represented because of the specific constitution of the representing mind or because the world as it is independently of the mind contains a feature which demands representation." (*The Subjective View*, p.1). The 'mind-dependence' of beauty places it firmly in the category of subjective representations. The experience of beauty is not the experience of reality as it is in itself. Beauty is not a feature of the world that demands representation. Beauty, and all of aesthetics, is therefore unreal, chimerical, mirage-like. Yet the mind-dependency of beauty is shared by secondary qualities in general, by colour and sound and smell, etc. Indeed, as scepticism again shows - and science shows in its own way - a vast area of experience is dependent upon the specific constitution of the human sense-organs and the human mind: damage the sense-organs or damage the mind (the brain) and you change the perceived nature of reality.

Nevertheless, aesthetic judgement emerges, overall, as a particularly mysterious activity. The idea that there is nothing in the world as it is independently of its representation in experience corresponding to an aesthetic term lends support to the feeling that aesthetic judgement is in some sense arbitrary. If the aesthetic judgement is not a judgement of plain fact it is a shot in the dark. There is no telling how a judgement *ought* to go;

we can at best say only how a judgement *usually* goes. (I.e., any 'ought' that enters into aesthetics is on this view an 'ought' in the the sense of 'it is likely that', which is to say an ought of expectation warranted by induction from past experience, rather than the 'ought' of rational requirement.) And that nothing in the world secures a particular judgement explains, moreover, the level of dispute surrounding aesthetic matters. It explains, also, our own insensitivities and incapacities. If we doubt whether this music is truly sombre or whether it is mock-sombre this is because nothing really points the way. There is no mechanical decision-procedure. We must strain to detect the infinitesimal stirrings of our emotions: each individual must hearken to his own feelings. An aesthetic judgement is not so much a statement about the world as a statement about an individual: an aesthetic judgement, floating free of the real world, is an item of self-revelation, of autobiography.

The argument proceeds: If an aesthetic judgement is not to be a matter of individual caprice, insulated from rational appraisal, and communicable only by means of a sort of persuasion, it must be 'available' to everyone - everyone must (in principle) be able to see what is at issue and, so to speak, have a democratic say in the matter. No-one must be disqualified from knowledge of the aesthetic fact by reason of individual circumstance and makeup. A fact that is available, logically, only from one point of view is subject-dependent and therefore not an indication of how reality is in itself (as reality is independently of subjects). The idea of

an objective fact is precisely the idea of a fact that does not require, for its recognition, particular capacities, circumstances, or conditions of observation². Such a fact commands universal assent because access to it is not restricted by any contingencies of experience: it enters in some way into the experience of everyone. Thus a dispute about an objective fact holds out the possibility of solution because the fact is by definition open to universal view. (It is worth saying here that the objective fact is available to everyone and everything - every sentient thing. A fact that appears to every *human* would, under this conception of objectivity, enjoy a quasi-objectivity. True objectivity is an absolute notion. Objectivity proper does not admit of degrees.) If there is a doubt in the aesthetic case, then, it concerns whether and to what extent 'aesthetic facts' are available to everyone. And so we are drawn into the question of what is necessary to a fact if it is to be open to universal view. And the answer here is that the fact must be objective in the relevant sense.

The objective account of the world, comprised by objective facts, has been described by Thomas Nagel as 'the view from nowhere'. The view from no-where is a terminus on a continuum running from "the point of view of a particular individual, having a specific constitution, situation, and relation to the rest of the world," to "a conception of the world which as far as possible is not the view from anywhere within it" (*Mortal Questions*, p.206). The attainment of objectivity, says Nagel, involves "abstraction

from the individual's specific spatial, temporal, and personal position in the world, then from the features that distinguish him from other humans, then gradually from the forms of perception and action characteristic of humans, and away from from the narrow range of a human scale in space, time, and quantity" (Ibid). The upshot of this is that the objective facts are independent of human scale. The objective facts are the residue of this furious work of abstraction. They do not require for their representation any of the things that can be 'thought out' of a specific subjective view. And that means, in the terms of Nagel's formulation, that an objective fact cannot depend upon an individual's 'spatial, temporal, and personal position in the world', nor can it depend upon 'forms of perception and action characteristic of humans', nor yet upon the human conceptions of space time, and quantity.

Inevitably, a question arises concerning the character of the conception of the world that remains. The question takes the form of a dilemma: if an objective account of the world amounts to a determinate conception of how things are then the objectivity of the account looks to be compromised. For it may just be another account from a particular place in the world - an account with greater scope, to be sure, but no less anthropocentric for that. On the other hand if an objective account of the world does not amount to a determinate conception of how things are it begins to come adrift from explanation and representation altogether. The truly indeterminate conception may not have the resources to pick out and deal with any features of the world at all¹⁰. Both

difficulties are represented in science as we now have it. On the one hand there are theories that explain by what might be called metaphorical extension. Macro-phenomena (e.g., pressure-volume relationships) are accounted for by reference to micro-phenomena (elastic collisions between micro-particles) conceived, in turn, on the model of further macro-phenomena¹¹. We talk, for instance, of light- and sound- waves. We try to accommodate the esoteric findings of relativity theory in talk of gravity-wells, space-time curves, and event-horizons¹². The point here is two-fold. First, the intelligibility of these theories - the feeling that we 'have a handle on them' - comes from the fact that we can explain events by means of causal interactions familiar to us from everyday experience: we have, if you like, a kind of scientific homuncularism. Second, the organization of theory itself depends upon the use of these metaphoric terms: it may make a huge difference whether your theory groups light under particle-theory or wave-theory. How you conceive of your theory (the way in which you picture the entities of which your theory treats) will very likely have a hand in deciding the direction of future research and practical application (see, for example, T. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*). And our specifically human concerns may structure theory by suggesting connections between phenomena that we would otherwise have overlooked or undervalued. For example, the scientific study of disease will very likely classify phenomena (viruses, amino-acids, etc) with an eye to how they influence the human constitution - and this will lend the human account a particular slant: the rock will split in one direction rather than

another, so to speak¹³. So the position that we occupy in the world finds expression in our scientific theories and is responsible for the degree to which we find a given explanation intelligible. On the other hand there are theories that are not conceptually determinate, e.g., relativity- and quantum- theory. While these theories are instrumentally successful their *significance* is far from obvious. In the absence of a clear and authoratitive interpretation of the mathematics involved it is reasonable to say that we do not know quite what such theories tell us about the world¹⁴. We do not know what they *mean*. They tell us, to be sure, to expect such-and-such an outcome to such-and-such a sequence of events. But these forecasts, it seems, are little better than uncannily accurate predictions issuing from an oracle. These are not *explanations*, for they do not provide a *rationale* of events. These theories, then, fall short of providing a *view* of the world. The intuitive understanding that is lacking would constitute such a view; but it would at the same time contaminate the scientific account with subjective elements. The initial dilemma may be reformulated: we have on the one hand, in the shape of the more abstract and mathematical of the sciences, a successful but intuitively opaque method of inquiry - this yields no particular view of the world, forces no determinate interpretation, and as a consequence is somewhat thin on significance or meaning; and we have on the other hand, in the shape of the less abstract sciences, a method of inquiry that, at the price of more or less anthropocentricity, yields pictures of the world with more or less scope, determinacy, and precision.

Another facet of this general problem, which may shed further light on the issue, concerns the notion of cause itself. On the objective view the only relation that really holds between events is the causal relation. Value-relationships, relationships based upon perception of secondary qualities, and conceptual relationships generally are regarded with suspicion. The following thesis, from Colin McGinn's *The Subjective View*, is typical: "It is often observed that secondary qualities are explanatorily idle...these qualities are not ascribed to things as part of the enterprise of explaining the causal interactions of objects with each other: colour and taste do not contribute to the causal powers of things...the interactions between objects proceed independently of the experiences of perceivers" (p.14/15). Now in the first place it is only true to say that secondary qualities are explanatorily idle if you are thinking - as McGinn obviously is - of causal explanation. Explanations may proceed in non-causal terms: I choose such and such a tie to go with such and such a shirt - sometimes one combination and sometimes another is appropriate (depending upon the occasion and the conventions that I am aware of governing this area of conduct). This is not on the face of it a causal explanation of the sort that McGinn is thinking of (i.e., Humean Causation). (And if the example seems to beg the question this is no more question-begging than McGinn's assumption that causal explanation is the only real form of explanation.) The second objection is more serious. It is that the idea of cause and effect itself begins to vanish on the objective assumption. For along with our anthropocentric point of view goes a system of

classification by means of which causes and effects may be picked out from the flux of physical happenings around us. Events emerge as such only under a description. So even though we imagine, as McGinn points out, that "the interactions between objects proceed independently of the experiences of perceivers", this is true only in the sense that if there were no perceivers things would still happen. There would still be a world and there would still be events. But we could form no idea of such a world. For although events may not depend upon human perceivers for their existence, events under a certain description do so depend upon perceivers. And part of that description will involve subjective, or anthropocentric, elements. So if McGinn is to sustain the claim that there are non-anthropocentric causal explanations he must show more than that causes are themselves non-anthropocentric. He must show that their description is non-anthropocentric. He must show that there can be an *absolute definition* of cause and effect, that there is an absolute description of the world and of the events that take place in this world¹⁵. The problem is, however, that the objective/absolute conception of the world lacks the resources to pick out a huge variety of events. (It is possible to see this in the generalizing tendency of scientific enterprises. As a theory grows more comprehensive it reduces elements of particularity - it refers less and less to particular circumstances. It seeks to render more diverse phenomena intelligible in terms of fewer and fewer specialized or particular laws. In the the end the theory gives basic entities - atoms, electromagnetic waves, quanta, etc - plus laws of extreme generality: these are the *entire resources* of

the objective conception at this point. The only events on this conception are such things as collisions, repulsions, quantum-leaps, or whatever. Clearly, the phenomenal richness of events is lost. The macro-aspect of these micro-events is altogether impossible to articulate. It is as though - to use a metaphor of David Wiggins' - we were to look at a cell through a microscope: although we see the internal structure of the cell, and in that sense understand the cell minutely, we fail to grasp the cell in a larger sense, we miss the role of the cell within the body as a whole...) The idea of an event under a completely objective description, i.e., a description that describes causes as they really are independently of their representation by the human mind, may be likened to the notion of an absolute definition of cause, that is a cause defined in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. The difficulties of the latter enterprise are considerable¹⁶. Both ideas express the metaphysical ideal of final or absolute explanation. In short, it is possible to argue that the idea of a cause is itself an anthropocentric notion, is dependent upon a specifically human view of the world. It cannot be used, therefore, to drive a wedge between that which *really* exists, and so *really* enters into explanation, and that which only seems to exist due to the representational peculiarities of the mind.

Serious doubt, then, can be cast upon the possibility of a conception of reality that is absolute in the sense that it transcends and ultimately dispenses with subjective conceptions of

the world. This is the concept of a vision purified to the point of transparency. In the terms of another metaphor: it is the concept of a world without the means of sustaining human life'⁷. And with that thought I should like to turn to some of the views of Aristotle, which are relevant in this connection. Aristotle was often concerned to argue against a *moral* theory of austere and transcendent character rather than a specifically ontological/epistemological theory of that character (such as is considered above). But his arguments are quite general. Aristotle opposed transcendentalism on two counts. First, it is not a practical alignment on any subject matter (and remember that Aristotle's aim is essentially practical: "clearly it [the transcendent good] could not be achieved or attained by man; *but we are now seeking something attainable.*" *Nicomachean Ethics*, I. 6. My emphasis). The transcendent goal is not a practical goal. A transcendent standard is not a standard that we could hope to attain. Martha Nussbaum, for example, writes: "Aristotle emphasizes repeatedly that the goal of his ethical discourse is not theoretical but practical. It follows from this that there is no point to talking about the good life in an ethical enquiry insofar as this life is not practically attainable by beings with our capabilities. The life of a divine being might be ever so admirable; but the study of this life, insofar as it lies beyond our capabilities, is not pertinent to the practical aims of ethics." (*The Fragility of Goodness*, p.292/293.) Secondly, a transcendental alignment necessarily aims beyond the the parochialism of anthropocentricity. It is, we might say, an un-

human (rather than inhuman) alignment. Says Aristotle: "clearly the virtue we must study is human virtue; for the good we were seeking was human good and the happiness human happiness" *N.E.*, I. 13. Human properties are of no particular concern on a transcendental view. The peculiarly human perspective is abandoned. And this amounts to nothing less than a rejection of human identity. Says Nussbaum: "[The life we choose] must be a life that we, as we deliberate, can choose for ourselves as a life that is really a life for us, a life in which there will be enough of what makes us the beings we are for us to be said to survive in such a life." (*The Fragility of Goodness*, p.193.) The relevance of these thoughts to the issue of the objectivity of aesthetic judgement should be plain enough. First, the fact that a position outside all human concerns fails to find support for those concerns is not only unsurprising, it is uninteresting. The crucial point, which cannot be overlooked, is that we do not occupy a position outside human concerns. And why should we (supposing we could)?¹² The fact that the objective view of things finds no place for aesthetic value simply shows the irrelevance of the objective view for the aesthetic understanding. In this life we cannot but encounter aesthetic value and it is the practical aim of aesthetics, or thought about the goodness of experience in general, to render the field of aesthetic appreciation intelligible, to bring it into clearer focus, and to reveal its complexities. This is the fact from which we start - this is the given, the form of life. Second, a non-anthropocentric alignment on the world aims to supplant the subjective human perspective. But, given the

scepticism expressed above about the possibility of doing without some sort of perspective, the rejection of the human perspective would necessitate the adoption of some other perspective. And even were this possible - and it's a very strange idea - we have no reason for doing any such thing. For all perspectives are, surely, on the same level. Also, the human point of view is in some sense constitutive of the human condition. Far from being evidence of the human state of error and confusion (the epistemologically fallen state of man) it is the distinctive frame within which humans work. The later ideas of Wittgenstein are relevant here. It is not a matter for despair that we are forever within a human conceptual system. We are not thereby doomed to a distorted picture of the world. For we only feel at home within this system. It is here that our distinctions and our discriminations have their point. The human system is our *only* frame of reference. Says Wittgenstein: "I did not get my picture of the world by satisfying myself of its correctness; nor do I have it because I am satisfied of its correctness. No: it is the inherited background against which I distinguish between true and false" (*On Certainty*, 94). The human point of view provides our *only* terms of reference. If we abandon these terms of reference we shall have none. We shall in the end have no basis for any discriminations whatever.

The idea, then, that value does not exist as an objective fact rests upon a metaphysical notion of objectivity that is unattainable, impracticable, and without special appeal. No priority attaches to the objective conception of the world. It is

one conception amongst many, a perspicuous representation of some things but not of others. This is not to say that the enterprise of objective scientific enquiry is pointless or ill-conceived or harmful in itself. It is just to say that the scientific view is not the be-all and end-all of explanation. It provides an explanation rather than the explanation. What the objective conception lacks are the expressive resources to do justice to the full range of human experience. Consequently, the location of aesthetic value (and everything else that the objective view is ill-equipped to show) in some dimension of the world is necessary if our self-understanding, and our aspirations to self-knowledge, are not to be subject to artificial restriction. The difficulty is to understand how this 'value-location' is to be achieved²⁰.

II

At least one major philosophical tradition, deriving in part from Hume and Kant, propogates the view that a man is a partnership, or an association, of reason and desire (as a lichen is an association of an algae and a fungus). Most often these faculties work in concert, e.g., deliberating how best to satisfy a desire. Sometimes they are at odds, e.g., weakness of will²⁰. It is essential to this view of man, however, that reason and desire be recognized as mutually autonomous - in principle if not in practice. That is to say that reason must be a pure capacity, theoretically capable of 'clear-sighted' operation (examples of

disinterested rationality are logic and science), and desire must conceivably be simply appetitive, a brute want awaiting modification and guidance in the light of reason (examples of brute wants would be what Thomas Nagel calls 'unmotivated desires': hunger, thirst, sexual desire, and so forth). The picture is a familiar one. Desire furnishes basic motivation, i.e., sets the ends of action, and reason both determines efficient means and picks out those features of the world relevant to a given desire. Says Hume: "[Reason] can have an influence on our conduct only after two ways: Either when it excites a passion by informing us of the existence of something which is a proper object of it; or when it discovers the connection of causes and effects, so as to afford us means of exerting any passion" (*A Treatise of Human Nature*, p.459).

The point to focus on at this juncture is the characterization that has been given of desire, of human motivation. The fundamental sources of human motivation are here conceived as original existences, *sui generis* impulses, wholly contingent internal propellants of the human organism. Says Hume: "our passions, volitions, and actions are not susceptible of...agreement or disagreement [with real matters of fact or relations of ideas]; being original facts and realities, compleat in themselves" (Ibid, p.458). The phrase 'compleat in themselves' effectively seals passions and volitions off from the external world: they are not answerable to nor are they cognizant of the facts. These blind impulses will frequently manifest themselves as

Difficulties arise for this account when we take seriously the idea that desires and the rest are truly 'brute'. As Wiggins says, we are to imagine value as arising from the presence of a mysterious pro-attitude - "some extra oomph" - which does not result from or in any way effect cognition²¹ (Ibid, p.97). This oomph is closely associated with pleasure - it is perhaps the disposition or the tendency to take pleasure in an activity or state of affairs. Pleasure is the candidate psychological state here because there seems virtually no room at all between pleasure and the right kind of pro-attitude or positive motivating factor: there seems a logical relation between the taking of pleasure in something and the taking of a pro-attitude towards it - it is difficult to imagine someone taking genuine pleasure in something while adopting a negative attitude towards it²². Pleasure is as near as it seems possible to get to an *intrinsic* good. The disposition to take pleasure in this or that attaches itself, so to speak, in a wholly contingent manner to things in the world. Consequently, there is no more rationality to my basic valuations than there is to the salivating of a Pavlovian dog. Reason goes to work *after* the desire is in place. The initial emplacement of the desire is a dark process; but it is certain that reason has no role to play. All actual motivations stem from brute desires, either directly or as rational consequences of those desires.

One difficulty with the idea of a brute motivation of this kind is that the motivating desire must be identified by essential reference to that for which it is the desire. Otherwise it is a

nothing - it is just a source of 'potential motivation', like the energy stored in a battery, or a coiled spring. And if the desire is for something very general, e.g., pleasure, there is very little explanatory value in the postulation of the desire: why did the spring uncoil at this time and in this manner, why did the energy dissipate along this avenue? If, on the other hand, the desire is for something very particular, e.g., a chocolate-chip ice-cream, the generality required of explanation is lost: the release of energy is a different phenomenon every time. A companion dilemma to the dilemma encountered earlier (pp. 18-20) arises here: either the content of the desire is determinate, in which case the desire ceases to count as a *general* motivation; or the content of the desire is indeterminate, in which case it ceases to count as an *explanation* of motivation. The desire is too broad in scope or it is too narrow in scope. If it is too broad it will explain nothing - all and every motivation will arise from the same source²³. If it is too narrow we shall require any number of brute desires of extreme particularity in order to account for motivation²⁴. Despite the difficulties pleasure is frequently nominated as the most general source of motivation. A desire for pleasure seems to render motivation intelligible - for who could argue that pleasure is to be sought, i.e., willed? - while allowing extreme latitude in the specification of what constitutes pleasurable activity. And herein lies the difficulty. The task of keeping pleasure-seeking non-cognitive, of keeping pleasure itself out of the reckoning, is difficult in the extreme.

Another difficulty concerns the fact that pleasure, on this view, constitutes the only source of value. Only the pleasure that satisfaction of a brute desire yields is intrinsically worthwhile. Aesthetic value, then, comes from the desire for certain pleasures. It does seem, after all, that aesthetics has something to do with pleasure. (Though, as has been pointed out more than once, much art does not exactly deliver straight pleasure - it may be disturbing or distressing, it may involve much intellectual effort, and so forth.) So, on the non-cognitivist view, the worth of all things is *extrinsic*, it comes from *outside*, and such value as things have is related directly to the extent to which they conduce to aesthetic pleasure. But in aesthetics, as in morals, we value things because we see them as *intrinsically* worthwhile. And in aesthetics no less than in morals we frequently recognize a multiplicity of intrinsic goods - e.g., simplicity, perspicuity, comprehensiveness, richness, and so on. And we may recognize that these intrinsic goods are not only not commensurable by a single standard but that they are even incompatible in some circumstances (for example, a rich and imaginatively fecund work may be forced to forego the sort of simplicity and classical elegance that a work of more limited scope and means can afford - so we say: this music is great and expansive at the expense of formal excellence; or: this music is great in spite of formal flaws). It is implausible to suppose that pleasure is a simple psychological state or quantity. The pleasure that I take in something is responsive to the value that I believe the thing to objectively have. This kind of fulfillment cannot be separated from those activities that secure

fulfillment. It is questionable, therefore, that the articulacy, comprehensiveness, and precision of our aesthetic values derive from the rational pursuit of a single end such as pleasure.

The idea of intrinsic goods leads to the related idea of intentionality. The non-cognitivist account may be charged with misdescribing the *directedness* of desires and values. Aesthetic value is to all appearances a response to something 'out there' in the world. As John McDowell puts it: "Aesthetic experience typically presents itself, at least in part, as a confrontation with value: an awareness of value as something residing in an object and available to be encountered. It thus invites the thought that value is...part of the fabric of the world"²⁵. It certainly does not appear as the non-cognitivist says it is. Aesthetic thinking is directed outward, is responsive to the world, etc. Whether this art-work is more deserving of attention than that does not feel like a matter of personal preference - it is often a serious question to which great effort may be applied. And very many complex issues will enter into the final appraisal. This is very far from the sort of blunt introspective assessment that the non-cognitivist account might lead us to expect. (This is not to say that all questions of preference that are decideable by introspection are easy questions: whether I prefer, on balance, strawberry ice-cream to banana ice-cream may be excruciatingly difficult to determine. But the issue is as simple as that - no other concerns can be brought to bear upon the matter (Wiggins' phrase, 'aborescence of concerns', is again relevant...)). When I

justify an aesthetic judgement, or when I attempt to articulate an aesthetic response, my sole concern is with features of the object of my attention. I am not giving voice to my emotional state - at least not in the same way as when I say a hot bath is soothing and a cold drink enlivening²⁵.

III

The attempt, then, to locate value in the world by making value a manifestation of desire in the end grossly misdescribes the phenomenology of value. It assimilates all value to a kind of wanting. And although value and desire alike do seem to be species of pro-attitude the identification of the one with the other has *prima facie* plausibility only. For it is important to note that the concept of value is very often used in order to mark a distinction between pro-attitudes of subjective and objective character (an 'objective good' and a 'subjective good'). To say of someone that their valuations are an expression of desire is often to say that their valuations are either a sham or a self-deception. It is, for example, nearly always a reproof to accuse someone of valuing a thing only because they desire it. Thus the person who positively espouses slothful behaviour may be accused of rationalizing laziness. We shall say: 'There is nothing good about laziness, and you know it, you simply love home-comforts'. And it is a common form of self-deception to say of something that you cannot attain, but would like to, that it is after all not really

worth striving after. To say of something that it is valuable is, therefore, *not* the same as saying that you happen to like it. (The non-cognitivist, of course, will argue that however much the phenomenology suggests the objectivity of value - and there may be no doubt that the phenomenology does so suggest the objectivity of value - there is no warrant for passing from an apparently objective phenomenology to an objectivist account of value. But the onus is surely on the non-cognitivist to show why the phenomenology ought to be mistrusted.)

There are two ideas which are influential in bringing about the equation of value with desire. The first has been dealt with at some length already, namely, the idea that value is not a feature of the world as it is in itself. It is impossible on this view that the phenomenology of value be correct. The phenomenology - which suggests the reality of value - and the facts of the matter - which suggest the (absolute) unreality of value - come into direct conflict. The world, objectively conceived, lacks value. However, the objective conception of the world has been found wanting. The objective conception, quite apart from its tendency to shrink to nothing, limits the real so strictly that virtually nothing that we customarily encounter in the world *really* exists: an entire dimension of human life simply vanishes. And the correct response to this is to say, not that it's too bad for the subjective dimensions of human life, but rather that it's too bad for the objective conception of the world²⁷.

The second idea is that value is too strange a quality by far to be in the world. If this objection is not to be just a reiteration of the first objection it must rest upon grounds other than that value is anthropocentric. And the objection appears to amount to this: if value is to be an object of knowledge it must like all other items of cognition be perceptible. And although we are always seeming to perceive value in the world the perception involved must be a strange affair: for by what sense do we perceive value? And how could a bare perception bring with it the kind of pro-attitude that value has in train? If we are to be said to have knowledge of value then the character of value must be immediately apparent (as is the phenomenal character of red) or it must be logically deducible from sense-experience. But value does not seem to be presented to us with the immediacy of the usual sense-impressions. Nor does it seem deducible from sense-impressions. This is the so-called 'argument from queerness'. Hume offers the following version: "As the operations of human understanding divide themselves into two kinds, the comparing of ideas, and the inferring of matter of fact; were virtue discover'd by the understanding; it must be an object of one of these operations, nor is there any third operation of the understanding, which can discover it." (*Treatise*, p.463). It seems obvious to Hume that value does not consist in the comparing of ideas (for Hume even the idea that beauty consists in formal properties of objects would not suffice to show that aesthetic values are evident from the comparing of ideas, since in addition to the formal properties there would be required a positive motivational component, i.e., a

pro-attitude). And it seems obvious also that value is not a matter of fact, since although it sometimes appears that we have the *idea* (in the Humean sense) of value, there is no *impression* corresponding to this idea.

The argument from queerness trades heavily upon an unfavourable comparison of value with sense-experience. Whereas the senses furnish immediate hard data - pre-theoretical atomic sensations - the perception of value seems essentially mediated by concepts. Value is not perceived directly by any of the senses. And since the senses are the source of all knowledge value cannot be amongst things known... (The senses are, on this view, sources of hard data. Everything - all knowledge, all belief, all speculation on matters of fact - is answerable to the hard data of the senses. All the scientific theories of man might be demolished tomorrow but the data presented by the senses would survive without the slightest alteration. For the presentations of sense-experience are epistemologically prior to any theory. All theory, all conceptualization, is *grounded* in sense-data. All theories are accountable to sense-data. For the world of everyday is logically constructed out of simple sensation.)

The question arises: are aesthetic values, e.g., beauty, amongst the hard data of the senses? The answer appears to be that they are not. The hard data of the senses are comprised of simple sensory qualities - redness, hardness, sweetness, loudness, etc. These are undefinable, atomic, irreducible. Aesthetic values do

not share the apparent self-evidence and immediacy of this sort of sensation. If aesthetic values do not appear amongst the simple sensations are they logically inferred from simple sensations? The answer again appears to be that they are not. Aesthetic values do not amount to logically complex descriptions (as the difference between a movement of the arm and an action is not a difference of logical complexity, or the difference between black dots on a white ground and a picture-face is not a difference of logical complexity). The difficulty here is how something with the phenomenal properties of value can *logically* follow from basic sensations of a completely different character.

The argument from queerness involves, implicitly, the belief that there are amongst sensations what might be called natural distinctions. The world presents various arrays of qualities and we cannot but perceive the structure of the array. Distinctions as it were force themselves upon us. We should, for instance, have to be blind, or lacking in some sensory capacity, not to distinguish all the colours that we customarily distinguish (as well as all the colour-properties that we customarily discriminate, e.g., hue, saturation, complementariness, etc). Pre-theoretical sensation is of a determinate enough character to allow concepts to be abstracted from it. The concepts that we apply to experience are legitimized by the structure of experience.

It is questionable whether this account of sensation and its relation to concepts is correct. For one thing, it is an account

formulated after concept-acquisition. Pre-theoretical consciousness is not available to the language-user. The distinctions that sensation appears to force upon us, to wear upon its face, may for all that just be distinctions that we are taught to make - i.e., perhaps nothing leads us to make these distinctions. It is no use attempting to 'think out' the conceptual content of experience. Minimal descriptions of experience (a red blotch adjacent to a number of blue-and white blotches; a rapidly-fluctuating series of sounds; etc, etc.) do not necessarily amount to descriptions of experience-minus-the-concepts. (Of course, the logical atomism of this view encourages the idea that the only difference between raw sensation and complex experience is one of logical complexity. It is therefore only necessary to undo the logical knots that connect a complex experience to its constituent basic experiences to arrive at the non-complex basis of experience.)

An example may show the issue to better advantage. We imagine that all the concepts applicable to sensation lie open to us. It seems, for example, inconceivable that someone should discover a new colour. If we imagine the colour-vision of the wasp, which extends farther into the blue end of the spectrum than human vision, we imagine colours that we can see, perhaps enhanced in some way, given additional 'sparkle' or luminosity - so we imagine a limpid or throbbing electric blue, and so forth. But we do not imagine that it is similarly inconceivable that a new form of value be discovered. Perhaps this is what happens when new

artforms develop or when the tastes of a society change. When John McDowell says that value presents itself as "something residing in an object and *available to be encountered*" (my emphasis) he chooses his words carefully. Value, he suggests, is available but not compulsory - it is like an infection, available to infect but not without exception infectious. And the idea is that certain values may exist but not be encountered. We do not imagine, though, that colour-perception is likewise 'chancy' or 'optional'. We feel that it is impossible for a person with the requisite sensory apparatus to fail to encounter all the colours and all the colour-qualities that we encounter. There therefore seems to be a crucial disanalogy between sensory qualities that appear to inhere in the world and the value qualities that appear to inhere in the world. The former impress themselves upon us with the force of self-evidence. The latter are far more fugitive, fitful, and fickle. Which is to say, first, that we often do not hesitate to pronounce the colour of a thing but we might ponder an object's aesthetic character, and remain unsure about this for some time; second, there seems no question of offering the sort of argument in favour of a colour-concept as might be offered in support of an aesthetic concept - we feel that either someone sees the correct colour or they don't.

But the correct parallel for perceiving new forms of value is not perceiving an entirely new colour (as though new perceptual apparatus had sprouted...) It is seeing colour in a different way. I.e., the correct parallel is having new ways of talking about

colour. No new colour miraculously enters experience. Yet colour-*perception* is altered. Different parts of experience connect up. Different slants on the world come to the fore. Likewise, the correct parallel for the philistine, or the person to whom certain kinds of value are imperceptible, is not the colour-blind person, or the blind person (or the tone-deaf person, etc). It is the person whose colour-vocabulary is limited (they say that a colour is jolly and bright or dark and depressing. They cannot articulate more complex perceptions, of saturation, hue, colour-relationships, etc.).

On this view the distinctions that we make between basic sensations are learned distinctions. And so too are aesthetic distinctions. The metaphysical gulf between aesthetic experience and sense experience is, on this account, closed. The next chapter will explore this idea further.

Chapter Two.

The programme of locating value in some dimension of the world (see p.28) continues in this chapter. Initial sceptical questions have been held at arm's length, creating a breathing-space for aesthetic value. But it is not clear just how value is to be placed in the world, the role that it is to play, how it may be brought into the arena of rationality at large. It is to these questions that the present chapter turns.

Of this chapter the first section is occupied with putting forward the worries of the sceptic/non-cognitivist. One particular worry concerns how aesthetic terms, which seem not to have a determinate meaning (or, at any rate, seem resistant to easy definition), can be deployed meaningfully in discussion. A connection is made out, on behalf of the non-cognitivist, between definability and rationality. The non-cognitivist thesis is, therefore, that aesthetic terms, not being amenable to definition, are not amenable to rational appraisal, i.e., cannot take part in the sort of activities we have come to regard as constitutive of rationality - normative argument, discussion, demonstration, proof and refutation, etc.

The worry arises because it is easy to see what 'red' or 'sour' refers to, it is easy to present someone with a clear and paradigmatic sample of red or sour; but it is not easy to see what, for instance, 'elegant' refers to (note, incidentally, the relation

between this worry and the epistemological version of the argument from queerness, which trades upon the elusiveness of value). Even if we were to give someone an elegant object we could not indicate just where the elegance lay. Thus a question mark appears to hang over elegance - or any aesthetic quality - which, it seems, does not hang over red or sour. I.e., the concept 'red' or the concept 'sour' holds a determinate place in discussion (everyone knows what these concepts mean); but the concept 'elegant' cannot be pinned down. The rationality of discussions involving aesthetic concepts is threatened by this persistent unclarity.

The aim of the second section is in effect to make more clear, in the light of an objection such as this, the implications of the non-empiricist epistemology encountered at the end of the first chapter. Where the license for applying a concept comes from, if not from sense-experience, is discussed, and the complexity, the possible semantic richness, of 'open' or 'loose' concepts is considered. The upshot is that a concept's resistance to encapsulation in a pithy formula or a precise definition (manageable definition) is not a sign that the concept has no meaning. Therefore, these concepts may enter into determinate discussions and, no less than precisely-defined concepts such as those employed in the sciences, may allow rational discussion. In other words, aesthetic concepts need not admit of succinct definition to be capable of supporting, or of entering into, rational discussion. These considerations occupy the second

section, and effectively answer the sceptical questions raised in the first section.

The third section introduces a different worry. This is that aesthetic terms, even if governed by conditions, are not wholly governed: there must be room for personal feeling to operate. The view is propounded that aesthetic terms have a dual meaning, one factual and condition-governed, the other emotive and free-floating. Grains of irrationality, therefore, remain in aesthetics. The third chapter takes up this point.

I

There is a difficulty, perceived to be common to both ethics and aesthetics, to do with the *meaning* of many of the concepts characteristic of - indeed essential to - aesthetic and ethical activity. Whereas, e.g., the meaning of 'prime number', or 'bachelor', or 'one mole of potassium permanganate' is quite clear - such that we can't imagine an argument arising over what constitutes a prime number or one mole of a substance (though of course there can be arguments over whether a particular number, say 18549003, is prime, or whether so many grams of a substance is really one mole, etc) - the meaning of 'x is a good painting' or 'y is a good man' is not so clear. What are we saying of a man if we say that he is a *good* man? What qualities must an object have if it is to be an *aesthetically good* (beautiful) object? Have we in

either case said anything determinate about the man or the object? Similarly, what it means to say that someone is 'depraved' or 'honourable', or what it means to say that something is 'elegant' or 'sensitive', is unclear - at least, it is not so clear as what makes a number a prime number, or what makes a man a bachelor, or what makes a quantity of a chemical a mole of that chemical. The difference may be brought out by considering that the concepts 'prime number', 'molar quantity' and 'bachelor' can be applied fairly mechanically: a computer could be programmed to pick out prime numbers from a list or an array of numbers; to compute the mass of one mole (or whatever) of any chemical for which it was given the formula; or to identify the marital status of people for whom it held records. But could a computer be relied upon to apply the concepts 'elegant' and 'sensitive' correctly?²⁸ There are no computers - no programmes - in existence today that could distinguish between the elegant and the inelegant across a range of objects, e.g., string-quartets, kinetic sculptures, motor-car dashboard designs, hairstyles, speeches, etc, etc. And the important point is that, if asked to write the appropriate programme, we should not know where to begin. And of course the same is true for concepts like 'depraved', 'honourable', 'just', and the like.

So what does this establish? Are we to say that we do not know what goodness, or beauty, is? Are we to say that the concepts that enter into ethics and aesthetics have no determinate meaning? For the indefinability of these concepts seems to throw up such

questions as: How do we know elegance when we see it? What considerations lead us to say that a poem, for example, is recited sensitively? Just what differentiates an honourable action from a dishonourable action? And so on. The general questions that come to the fore are: What is it precisely that makes an object beautiful or makes a man good? Were clear definitions available these questions, it is to be supposed, would not arise. For if someone said of a man that he was a good man, or if someone said of an object that it was a beautiful object, it would be possible pin down exactly what was at issue. A checking procedure could be brought to bear, and the goodness of the man or the beauty of the object could be established conclusively. Failure of strict definition seems, ultimately, to undermine various rational procedures, e.g., analysis, comparison, verificiation. Thus if aesthetic or ethical terms cannot be defined satisfactorily the rationality of ethics and aesthetics is called into question: crudely, the problem in any particular case becomes: what is the discussion really about? In what follows I shall argue that the rationality of an activity is not dependent upon its being amenable to simple formalization. Nor is the possibility of formalization an condition of the existence of rationality in an activity.

In an introductory book on Aesthetics²⁷ Anne Sheppard discusses the elusiveness of the definition of beauty. She rejects, first of all, the idea that beauty may be defined as a simple quality available to us via some sort of intuitive faculty. This, she says, "is in effect a refusal to engage in further

discussion." (p.61). It is, she thinks, hardly an improvement to define beauty in terms of more specific aesthetic concepts such as 'elegant', 'picturesque', 'coarse', etc. She says: "If we say that beauty is to be defined in terms of more specific aesthetic qualities we are faced with a very large range of qualities of different types...These more specific qualities themselves require definition. In particular it remains unclear just how they are related to the qualities that give rise to them, how daintiness, for example, is related to smallness and neatness. Neatness might itself be considered an aesthetic quality: how is it in turn to be defined?" (p.62/63). I.e., a definition of the aesthetically good in terms of aesthetic qualities fails to resolve the vagueness of 'aesthetic' - the heart of the problem is left intact; the problem is simply fragmented. In the run up to this passage Sheppard mentions the key difficulty, namely, that "it is not possible to specify a set of necessary and sufficient conditions which must all be satisfied if something is to count as dainty, majestic, or graceful." (p.62) And she finds unsatisfactory the idea that our best definition of 'dainty', for example, may oblige us to "fall back on saying something like, 'Dainty people are usually small and neat' and on offering examples" (p.62). (What is unsatisfactory about these definitions is that the essential thing is again missed out: what, e.g., is daintiness?) Clearly, her requirement, that with which she will feel comfortable, is the kind of clarity and rigour that is to be found in mathematics or science, exemplified by concepts such as 'prime number', 'molar quantity', 'bachelor', etc. For she gives every indication of being quite dissatisfied

with definitions which retain so to speak the smallest particle of vagueness, i.e., definitions which 'fall back' on approximations, rules of thumb, and statements of a general kind.

Sheppard, however, objects not only to the attempt to define the beautiful in terms of other, more particular, aesthetic qualities; she objects also to the attempt to define the beautiful in terms of non-aesthetic qualities. There is always a gap, she says, between the factual description and the aesthetic evaluation. She concludes: "Attempts to define beauty in terms of particular non-aesthetic qualities are always open to counter-examples; suggested definitions are always both too narrow, in failing to include instances of beauty, and too wide, in failing to exclude instances which have the relevant non-aesthetic qualities and yet are not beautiful." (p.63). Obviously, such charges could not be laid against definitions of 'prime number' or of 'molar quantity' or of 'bachelor'. In these cases there is no 'overlap' or 'underlap', no gap between the extension of the concept and the extension of the definition: the definiens and the definiendum fit one another like hand and glove.

So Sheppard rejects three attempts to define beauty. These attempts fail, she says, because "they cannot account satisfactorily for the nature of aesthetic appreciation and for the relationship between aesthetic judgements and purely descriptive judgements, because they cannot explain how we can offer reasons for our aesthetic judgements, make aesthetic comparisons, and

attempt to resolve aesthetic disagreements." (p.64). Now undoubtedly the first account of beauty that Sheppard considers - that it is a simple quality that we perceive via intuition - has little to say on these matters. The perception of beauty on this account is unanalysable. Therefore an anatomy of the aesthetic judgement is not to be expected. How one intuition is pitted against another and how one intuition may be defended against another is, admittedly, unclear. So Sheppard's criticisms are perhaps justified. But what of the idea that the concept of beauty breaks down into, or is an umbrella term for, a great many other aesthetic concepts? Or of the idea that aesthetic concepts are governed by conditions that may be stated in non-aesthetic terms? Why should the fact that no definition of aesthetic concepts in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions is forthcoming preclude a satisfactory account of the rationality of aesthetic activity?

The problem that I started with was: what do we mean when we say that a man is good or that an object is beautiful? Have we said anything about the world and if we have what have we said? I have suggested that Anne Sheppard's discussion of the concept 'beautiful' implies the thesis that rationality and definability are bound together such that where there are no precise definitions there is either an impaired rationality or there is no rationality at all - rationality can get little or no purchase on loosely-defined concepts (see, in this connection, pp. 47/48, and section II of this chapter, especially pp. 62-67; the latter in particular

examines the idea that rationality and definability are logically related). That thesis is, in effect, the claim that we are unlikely to arrive at a better understanding of the meaning of aesthetic concepts by looking closely at the fine aesthetic judgements that we make or by looking at the factual judgements that we might bring out in support them. And this, it seems to me, is quite false³⁰. For although I too want to argue that definitions fail I want to claim that their failure is not to be treated as an indication of the 'queerness' or unreality/irrationality of aesthetic concepts. I want to argue initially that there is an intelligible relation between 'purely factual' judgements and judgements of aesthetic value: aesthetic concepts are, we might say, *well-governed*³¹. Hence we can see how arguments may arise and be settled. We can see how an aesthetic discussion might proceed: it will proceed like many another discussion, e.g., is this magenta or is it orange? Is his manner better described as stately or as supercilious? Am I truly anxious or am I merely dramatizing my own situation? And so on. The choice of an aesthetic term may be no more and no less delicate a matter than the choice of any 'purely descriptive' term. And *that* is to say that the looseness of an aesthetic concept does not preclude its hanging on a great many subtle conditions, nor from communicating an extremely precise meaning.

Since Sheppard charges definitions of beauty with an inability, specifically, to give a satisfactory account of the rationality of aesthetic activity I shall consider it incumbent

upon the present account to at least go some way towards meeting that challenge. Sheppard's challenge comprises at least four sub-challenges: first, to account for the relationship between aesthetic judgements and purely descriptive judgements; second, to explain how we can offer reasons for our aesthetic judgements; third, to explain how we can make aesthetic comparisons; and, fourth, to explain how we can attempt to resolve aesthetic disagreements.

So what I want to consider now is the possibility that concepts that can be defined only loosely, which in the end elude, for all practical purposes (such as programming a computer), definition, can nonetheless support argument and discussion, can be answerable to 'factual judgements', can allow aesthetic comparisons, and so forth. I shall be arguing, therefore, that precision of the sort required by Sheppard is not a prerequisite of rationality.

II

Wittgenstein, in the *Philosophical Investigations*, asks us to imagine replacing blurred outlines in one picture with sharp outlines in another. Then he says: "But if the colours in the original merge without a hint of any outline won't it become a hopeless task to draw a sharp picture corresponding to the blurred one? Won't you then have to say: 'Here I might as well draw a

circle or a heart as a rectangle, for all the colours merge. Anything - and nothing - is right.' - And this is the position you are in if you look for definitions corresponding to our concepts in aesthetics or ethics." (*Philosophical Investigations*, 77). In other words, the concepts of aesthetics and ethics all run into one another, and it is not possible to lay down with any precision the logically necessary and sufficient conditions under which the concepts apply. (That is to say that the task of attempting to *formalize* the concepts of ethics and aesthetics is to be likened to the attempt to draw strict boundaries where none can be drawn. It is a hopeless enterprise. And Wittgenstein's larger point is that a certain kind of philosophizing spirit will make no headway in ethics or aesthetics because no general statements may be made³². The boundaries that philosophy of this sort seeks to draw will be stipulative rather than descriptive...) Wittgenstein does not say, however, that these 'blurred concepts' are therefore useless, or second-rate, or otherwise 'half-baked'. Indeed, the sections immediately following and immediately preceeding the section here quoted are devoted to showing that such a conclusion is unwarranted.

Wittgenstein argues³³, first, that a truly vast number of concepts does not conform to the necessary-and-sufficient-conditions model. To suppose otherwise is to conceive of language as a mechanical construct governed at all points by strict rules ("For it will then also become clear what can lead us (and what did lead me) to think that if anyone utters a sentence and *means* or

understands it he is operating a calculus according to definite rules." P.I. 81). Terms that may be rigorously formalized are the exception rather than the rule, and are more or less confined to specialized disciplines such as science and mathematics. In natural language it is usual for a tremendous complex of diverse relations to hold between concepts. These relations Wittgenstein described, famously, as like the resemblances between members of a family. Just as an individual is not deemed to have the physiognomy characteristic of a particular family on the basis of some one invariable feature that he has in common with all other members of the family so particular instances are not deemed to fall under a given concept on the basis of some one invariable feature that all have in common and which the concept 'names'.

Wittgenstein argues, secondly, that a 'blurred concept' is no less useful, and therefore no less legitimate, than a 'sharp concept'. The blurred concept may achieve an end no less effectively than the sharp concept. Moreover, the idea that really puts blurred concepts in a bad light, namely the idea that they are approximations to or imprecise statements of some *ideal* expression, is dismissed by Wittgenstein as a kind of superstition. He is critical of the idea that there is a single standard of exactness to which all things, be they concepts, rules of inference, or empirical measurements, must conform ("We eliminate misunderstandings by making our expressions more exact; but now it may look as if we were moving towards a particular state, a state

of complete exactness; and as if this were the real goal of our investigation." P.I. 91).

Now, the first of Wittgenstein's arguments puts aesthetic concepts - or blurred concepts generally - on an equal footing with the concepts that find expression in language generally. The difference between aesthetic language (aesthetic concepts) and the 'rest of language' is a difference in degree rather than a difference in kind. One author, Sabina Lovibond (in *Realism and Imagination in Ethics*), describes this move as a 'levelling out' of the concepts in language: no area of language, e.g., scientific language, is granted superiority over another. No form of expression, e.g., the empirical, fact-stating proposition, is allowed to occupy centre stage in the theory of language. (And, of course, by parity no areas of language, e.g., aesthetic or ethical language, is *inferior* to another, nor are any forms of expression, e.g., the aesthetic judgement, peripheral to language...) This argument, however, leaves open the possibility that the greater part of natural language is irreparably flawed, that the vagueness of concepts is a *shortcoming*. On this view the levelling out of the concepts in language brings about a lowering of respectable concepts rather than an elevation of aesthetic concepts: if there is no distinction between aesthetic concepts on the one hand and the run of concepts on the other then the 'bad reputation', so to speak, of aesthetic concepts must infect other concepts: all must be tarred with same brush. The second of Wittgenstein's arguments seeks to forestall this line of thought. The argument has two

aspects. On the one hand there is an argument that denies that exactitude and precision is necessary in all contexts. Just as it is not always necessary to take a hammer to a nut so it is not always necessary to strive after the greatest exactitude conceivable. Says Wittgenstein: "Am I inexact when I do not give our distance from the sun to the nearest foot, or tell a joiner the width of table to the nearest thousandth of an inch?" (P.I. 88). On the other hand a *reductio* argument is employed against the idea that there is an absolute standard of exactitude against which things may be measured. For it is, after all, only as compared with a transcendental standard of exactness that everyday concepts can come to seem imprecise and approximate. Parallels may immediately be seen between this idea and the idea that there is one absolute conception of reality to which all authority is arrogated. For the idea that there is one standard of exactness entails that there is one thing against which all statements may be measured for exactness. And this one thing is the way the world is in itself. Exactness, on this view, means 'degree of correspondance with the way things really are'. Wittgenstein signally fails to endorse this view when he asks what something's being exact can mean other than that it achieves its purpose effectively. He does not, that is, say that something's being exact means that it corresponds with the way the world really is.

There are, then, three arguments in support of the view that the 'blurred concepts' of aesthetics are not, because blurred, at a disadvantage. Discussion of the first argument, that aesthetic

concepts do not constitute a special case, I shall postpone for the moment.

The idea that language might be too vague to execute the tasks with which it is charged implies that language and the tasks it executes can be prised apart. Language, on this account, has a certain function: thus it is possible for language to fail in regard to this function. The function of language turns out to be to facilitate the communication of *thoughts* or *private perceptions*, i.e., to enable men to talk to one another about themselves and about the world. That is to say that language on this view is a device used by men to overcome the barriers that exist between minds - or it is an instrument that allows those barriers to be penetrated with greater success and with greater accuracy than other means of communication such as gestures or facial expressions. Thus the idea that a term in natural language may be *too vague* is an expression of the belief in a pre-linguistic experience of the world and of the self onto which language is skilfully grafted. (Note the extent of the parallel between this idea and the idea, explored at the close of the last chapter, that the structure of sense-experience is pre-linguistic.) And if language is poorly grafted onto experience it will not achieve its purpose. Words will produce, once through the interpersonal barrier, a distorted picture. Real communication will be jeopardized. Men will be unable to establish clear efficient communication.

It is easy to see how such ideas may arise. We often talk, for example, of attempting to express ourselves, of being lost for words, of failing in practice to realize our intentions. And it may seem as though we have within us a nugget of meaning awaiting expression, or a sense for which we cannot find the appropriate words, or an intention which we are unable to realize³⁴ - each of these existing in the mind as, on one view of sculpture, the statue exists within the stone, waiting to be hewn out. Or, if we are recounting an experience, we may feel that the point of our narrative is to *get across* what our experience was like. And we think: these people hear only my *words*; but my experience is hidden behind the words - my words simply cannot convey the phenomenological character of the experience. Therefore language falls short of the ideal, language fails us.

Wittgenstein opposes this way of thinking on a number of fronts, and some of these have been encountered already. I want here to highlight just one aspect of Wittgenstein's thought. It relates directly to the idea that some area of language, if not language in general, might have a purpose other than the one that it happens to be fulfilling. According to Wittgenstein this is just not possible for language that is *working*. (Language that is not working serves no purpose other than to confuse people.) The idea here is summed up by the assertion - to be found somewhere in the *Investigations* - that words, too, are deeds³⁵. That is to say that words are *doings*. Language is inextricably bound up with human activities and cannot be counted a phenomenon apart from

those activities. Language, says Wittgenstein, is woven into the fabric of human life. It is incorporated *organically* into human activity. It is not tagged on mechanically...A word is not unlike a gesture: it is a move in a language game, a recognized sign, a *doing* or a deed. To suppose, therefore, that a concept can fall short of its target is to fail to perceive the fact that a concept, when it is doing a job, when it has a role to play within an activity, when it counts as a valid move in the game, is no more or less than its role: it cannot fall short because there is no 'super-role' that it must conform to and no 'absolute-purpose' that it must fulfill. (That is not to deny that concepts may be sharpened in particular circumstances to serve a particular purpose. This is just like adding rules to a game - however, rules will be added to a game only when the game is not playable by the existing rules. Analogously, the addition of new concepts into, say, science occurs when the enterprise cannot continue with just the old concepts...) Language evolves along with the activities into which it is woven. It could be said, even, that linguistic expressions are subject to a process of natural selection. A flawed concept is analogous to an animal not fitted to its niche in the environment: the animal (that is, the species) either adapts or it dies. Likewise, an expression not fitted to its role either changes radically - that is to say takes on a different role - or it ceases to play a part in the language-game. Either way the expression is indivisible from the function that it fulfills.

The idea that 'blurred' or 'loose' expressions fall short of some requirement is vulnerable, also, to the question: Why, if our present language is flawed, isn't it improved? Why isn't it systematically brought up to scratch? How would such a programme proceed? Says Wittgenstein: "When I talk about language (words, sentences, etc.) I must speak the language of every day. Is this language somehow too coarse and material for what we want to say? *Then how is another one to be constructed?* And how strange that we should be able to do anything at all with the one we have!" (P.I. 120). Moreover, is it really feasible that a language manufactured in the laboratory - a test-tube language so to speak - could withstand the wear and tear of actual use?

The *reductio* argument should, I think, be approached via a certain route. It should, in particular, be viewed in the context of the discussion that leads up to it³⁵. It is to be borne in mind that Wittgenstein is discussing a conception of language that stands in opposition to that instanced by Augustine in the *Confessions*. He has compared uses of language to games (rather than calculi of rules) as early as section 7: "We can also think of the whole process of using words...as one of those games by means of which children learn their native language. I will call these games 'language-games' and will sometimes speak of a primitive language as a language-game...I shall also call the whole, consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven, the 'language-game'". He extends the game-metaphor for another fifty-odd sections, criticizing along the way elements of the rival

conception. Then, at section 65, he reaches one of those 'nodes' that punctuate part I of the *Investigations*, where the strands of thought are drawn together. He says: "Here we come up against the great question that lies behind all these considerations. - For someone might object against me: 'You take the easy way out! You talk about all sorts of language-games, but have no-where said what the essence of a language-game, and hence of language, is: what is common to all these activities, and what makes them into language or parts of language.'" Thus the considerations of fifty-odd sections condense into a question about the *definition* of a concept. Wittgenstein continues to be absorbed by this objection for some time, seeking to allay fears that an uncircumscribed concept is not a concept at all, and that a concept that is not everywhere bounded by rules is nonetheless a concept with as good a burden of meaning as any other (see, e.g., *Investigations* 69-89). He then moves into a discussion of why it should be supposed that a concept *must* be governed by definite rules. He argues that concepts not circumscribed at all points by rules still have a sense; and then he asks how it is supposed that rules govern the sense of a concept. How do rules secure the meaning of a concept? Aren't rules open to different interpretations? What gives the rules their sense? Thus there is a clear link between the sections on following a rule and the issue of whether it matters that a concept cannot be defined.

So Wittgenstein, arguing first that language is not, when you really look at it, a formal structure of concepts and rules of

application, at length asks: what if this were the correct account of language? How is it supposed to operate? How does it account for concept-application? Thus the *reductio* argument is a final attempt to break down resistance to the very idea of family-resemblance concepts. It is within this context that the rule-following considerations must be seen. Viewed as objections to the idea that a concept must have a strict definition in order to be intelligible they have a direct bearing on the issue of aesthetic concepts. For these concepts are perceived to suffer from vagueness, and Wittgenstein expressly states that here are concepts that cannot be formalized. The attempt to show that such concepts especially are legitimate involves undermining the conception of meaning and understanding that underpins faith in sharp concepts. Wittgenstein says, in effect, that the only reason loose concepts are considered with suspicion, or not even countenanced in philosophy, is because *other* concepts are thought to rest on a firmer foundation. Wittgenstein questions the basis of this belief and finds it wanting. The drift of his argument, and its general relevance to 'loose concepts' may be illustrated as follows. Since Wittgenstein's arguments are centred about the idea of seeing what is common and of expanding an arithmetical number series it will be expedient to develop an easy parallel between these on the one hand and aesthetic concepts on the other.

Imagine, then, the following three variations on a parlour guessing-game. [1] An arithmetical series is developed number by number and the participants have to determine what the next number

will be²⁷. Thus the series 1, 5, 11, 19 will elicit the response '29'. [2] A number of objects is named one after another and the participants have to say what the objects have in common. Thus 'pillar-box', 'fire-engine', and 'poppy' will elicit the response 'red'. [3] The common element is to be identified between things that include abstract names and concepts. Thus 'Poland', 'Georges Sand', and 'Death March' will elicit the response 'Chopin'. The game could be called, à la Wittgenstein, 'seeing what is common'. Variations [1] and [3] of the game are of particular interest here, though [2] is important as a bridge between the two. (It seems clear, in fact, that no line could be drawn between one variation and the next.) Now, it should be obvious that when we seek a definition of a concept such as 'elegant' or 'sensitive' we are engaged in an activity very closely akin to the third variation of the 'seeing-what-is-common' game. We could, for example, play variation [3] with the following objects in mind: 'an elegant string-quartet', 'an elegant necklace', 'an elegant motor-car dashboard', and so on. (Perhaps we should have to be more specific, and ask for what was common between *this* elegant string quartet and *this* elegant necklace, etc. And we could either present the items there and then or we could refer to examples of these things with which everyone was familiar.) And in this case we should be looking to see what was common between various instances of elegance.

It could be said, therefore, that when we look for a definition of a concept such as 'elegant' we are engaged in an

activity strictly analogous to seeking the formula of, or the regularity in, a number series. In the case of the number-series the importance of discovering the formula (seeing what is common) lies in the fact that the series can be expanded correctly (the common element may be repeated). In the case of the concept the importance of discovering the common element lies in the fact that the concept can be applied correctly to new cases. 'Seeing what is common' allows the sense in each case to be preserved: the number-series remains the *same* series and the concept continues to be the same concept. Now while it is an undeniable fact that 'seeing what is common' is an extremely important learning technique (thus do we discover the regularities of cause and effect. Thus, too, do we pick up on the meaning of many of the signs around us: if I see that traffic always stops at a red light I shall suppose the red light to be a command/request to stop. And so on) a metaphysical importance comes, by and by, to be attached to seeing what is common. The common element seems to express the sense of the number series on the one hand and the concept on the other. The sense of each, the pure precipitate of meaning, is distilled in the common factor. And it seems that when we expand the number-series or when we apply the concept we ensure that we are proceeding correctly by ensuring that we remain true to the pure sense that we have in the form of the formula or the definition.

Consider the expansion of the number-series. Suppose we are attempting to teach someone the meaning of the instruction 'add 2'. It is possible that someone may understand by 'add 2' what we

should call the instruction 'add 2 until the 1000th digit and then add 4'. Or, if we have demonstrated the operation '+2' with numbers of 1000 and more, our pupil might understand by '+2' the operation 'add 2 until the millionth digit and then add 4', or 'add 2 only if number does not contain the sequence 216; otherwise add 4', etc. We shall say that this person has not understood the meaning of the operation '+2'. But what is it to grasp the meaning of '+2'? It is not adequate to say that meaning of '+2' is given by what is common between each number in the series. For that is consistent with an operation that allows correct expansion of the series up to a certain point followed by incorrect expansion. Or it is consistent with an operation that allows correct extension of all numbers but prime numbers, or all numbers but numbers containing the sequence '216', or whatever. I.e., what is common between the numbers of any finite series of numbers is not entirely determined by the series as it stands. So what does grasping the principle '+2' consist in? The idea that Wittgenstein opposes is expressed most clearly not by Wittgenstein but by John McDowell³²: it is the idea that to understand the meaning of '+2' is to engage mental cogwheels with a set of rails, a pre-existing sense, and to allow these rails to determine the expansion of the series under '+2'. To understand '+2' as we should understand '+2 until the 1000th digit and then +4' or '+2 only if number does not contain sequence 216...etc' would be to engage the mental mechanism with the *wrong* set of rails. Wittgenstein's own metaphor is that of a machine which executes a particular set of movements. We imagine that the machine carries, somehow, all its possible movements with

it. The machine, once it is in motion, carries out the same operation time and time again. It is, says Wittgenstein, just such a picture that we have of the mind applying a formula: there is the machine and its invariable movement, always the same, and there is the formula and its consistent application, which again is always the same; going on in the same way seems to be tied as intimately to the formula as the movement of the machine is to the machine. The machine might churn out bottletops or press vinyl records. The formula churns out successive numbers in a series.

These metaphors express the feeling we have that the formula leaves no choice about what comes next - we apply the formula without any hesitation, we know exactly how to interpret it. But what guides us in this interpretation? How can something like an arithmetical formula, or some other representation of the sequence of differences, guide us in the expansion of the series? As Wittgenstein says: how can something that we grasp in a flash accord or fail to accord with the use, which is extended in time? Whatever we grasp in a flash can be put to different uses. That is to say that a rule rests on no more firm a foundation than the practice itself. How do I know how to go on? Because I know the rule that governs the expansion of the series. And how do I know how to follow the rule? I simply follow it..."There is a way of grasping the rule which is not an interpretation and which is exhibited in what we call 'obeying the rule' and 'going against it' in actual cases." (P.I. 201). Having grasped the rule is being able to proceed correctly.

Therefore, expressions of the rule - e.g., the formula, the definition - rest on no more firm a foundation than the rule itself. The formula cannot ground knowledge. Understanding a concept need not involve grasping something like a definition (the definition is, after all, a formalization of the practice).

The objection might persist: "But still, it is surely true that an ill-defined or vague concept cannot hold a determinate place in a discussion. No-one knows quite what it means. It is impossible to pin it down and subject it to rational scrutiny. Reason cannot get a hold on it." But of course the whole issue is precisely about what it is to know what something means. Certainly, it may be a sign that someone knows what something means that he can give a definition. Giving a definition, that is, may be a manifestation of knowledge. And giving a definition may be a succinct way of transmitting knowledge - witness the efficacy, on the whole, of the dictionary - but still that is not to say that knowledge is guided by or secured by a definition. For you must know what to do with the definition once you have it. (Relevant here, too, is the fact that knowing something and being able to express what you know are different things...)

The blurredness of the concepts in ethics and aesthetics, then, is not a sign of their infirmity, nor, for that matter, of their 'subjectivity'. It is as though Wittgenstein, having pointed out that much of language behaves in a much freer manner than might be supposed, turns to ethics and aesthetics as the places where

this is particularly apparent. (He could perhaps have said that one way of freeing yourself from the urge to think of language as a calculus with fixed rules would be to examine the concepts of ethics and aesthetics; for there a true melting-pot of concepts may be observed.) Thus Wittgenstein may be read as turning the usual conception of language - which places precise fact-stating discourse at the centre and aesthetics and ethics on the periphery - on its head.

I said earlier that I would consider some of the similarities between aesthetic concepts and concepts of a less controversial kind. In what follows I hope to narrow the gap between aesthetic concepts on the one hand and more pedestrian concepts on the other by considering similarities in the way in which these concepts enter into rational discussion.

III

A few precise rules suffice to 'fix' the concept 'prime number'. It is for this reason that a computer may be programmed to discriminate between prime and non-prime integers. The rules that fix a concept such as 'intelligent', on the other hand, are neither few nor precise (thus it's arguable whether the concept 'intelligent' is fixed). We could certainly write down a provisional list of abilities or qualities that we think an intelligent man ought to possess. Of this list some abilities will

rank more highly than others. I may, for example, rank the ability to play chess or do crossword puzzles more highly than the ability to speak a foreign language; or I may rank the ability to sight-read music more highly than the ability to whistle a remembered melody. So I shall be more ready to call a man intelligent who can play chess and do crossword puzzles, or who can sight-read music, than a man who can speak a foreign language, or who can whistle a remembered melody. We can say very generally that someone who has mastery of a number of diverse and difficult intellectual skills is entitled to be called intelligent: our list will undoubtedly contain a number of such skills, e.g., the ability to write poetry, to sight-read music, to calculate efficiently, and so forth. But no one item on our list will be sufficient for intelligence, nor is it likely that any one item will be necessary. A mathematical prodigy who cannot spell or string two sentences together is not intelligent. And if someone cannot play chess, or cannot do crossword puzzles, he may still be entitled to be called intelligent on the basis of other aptitudes which he displays/skills that he has.

An insight into the 'informal logic' of the concept 'intelligent' may be obtained by thinking how an argument concerning an application of it might arise, proceed, and - perhaps - be resolved. Suppose, e.g., I am challenged over the assertion that the man is more intelligent who can play chess and solve crossword puzzles than the man who can speak a foreign language. I may seek to justify my position by arguing that playing chess and

solving crossword-puzzles have more affinities with other intelligent-making activities than has speaking a second language. Thus I might try to draw parallels between puzzle-solving and chess-playing on the one hand and abstract reasoning and mathematical ability on the other. And I may suggest that playing chess and solving crossword puzzles involve an intellectual creativity, concentration, and resourcefulness not required of the speaker of a second language. These last concepts may forge a link between puzzle-solving and chess-playing on the one hand and other intelligent-making skills on the other.

Note, however, that the concepts 'resourcefulness', 'creativity', 'intellectual versatility' do not *strictly define* the concept 'intelligent'. They stand, rather, in roughly the same relation to the concept 'intelligent' as the concepts 'picturesque', 'elegant', 'fine' stand to the concept 'beautiful'. That is to say that they are no more amenable to crisp definition than the original concept. So how might they advance my argument? Does the mention of creativity and resourcefulness and intellectual versatility achieve anything more than the piling up of one vague term upon another?

Consider that these concepts - 'intellectual resourcefulness', 'creativity', 'concentration' - and others will form, along with 'intelligent', what might be called a concept-clique (or, in more overtly Wittgensteinian terms, a *family* of concepts): they are related to or associated with one another.

They tend to give one another support. Although they are by no means equivalent in meaning they sometimes (in some contexts) approach synonymy. Sometimes they differ from one another only slightly, so that, mentioned in the same breath, they alter one another's meaning ever so slightly. It seems to me that music offers a good metaphor for the way in which these concepts work. A concept may be compared to a scale of notes. Different notes represent different senses or applications of the concept. An 'adjacent concept' - i.e., a close relative in the family of concepts - may consist of a number of the same and a number of different notes (just as different scales have notes in common). Thus the concept 'intelligent' may, depending upon the context, cover anything from the behaviour of African Grey parrots to the thought of men like Einstein and Shakespeare. The concept 'creative', however, may not stretch to cover the behaviour of African Grey parrots in any context (and this is not because the parrots are not creative in the way that they are not yellow - it is just that the concept 'creative' has no place in talk about parrots) though it undoubtedly covers cases like Einstein or Shakespeare. Thus the concepts 'intelligent' and 'creative' share some applications - they have some notes or tones in common - but differ markedly in others. And just as extremely complex patterns may be created in music so extremely complex effects may be achieved through careful juxtaposition of concepts. Deploying a number of concepts in a particular context will be like playing a series of notes: each note takes on colour according to the notes before and after it, which is to say that its meaning in a piece of

music is more than its meaning alone²⁷. Thus a concept may be vague when considered in the abstract and without companions - here it is vague in the same way that a single note is vague. The note belongs to no key in particular and has no 'direction' - there is no movement in the 'music' at this point. But if more notes are played the music begins to move in a certain direction, a key is established, and the note occupies a significant place in the musical structure. Likewise, as concepts are deployed they interact with one another, and the sense begins to emerge like the direction, mood, and meaning of a piece of music.

The idea may be expressed diagrammatically. (See Appendix I.)

The strategic deployment of various 'loose concepts' may little by little restrict the feasible compass of a dispute. Each loose concept will extend over a range of paradigm cases. Thus the concept 'creative' may encompass the activity of a poet, a mother, an entrepreneur - each of these might count as anchoring a key application of the concept 'creative' (a different note in the scale). The concept 'intellectual versatility' may encompass the virtues of a philosopher, a politician, a chat-show host. As more and more concepts are deployed the area where they can be said to overlap may diminish (just as the more discrete points there are on a graph the better the curve that can be drawn). As the musical metaphor brings out, one concept may amplify another, or slightly modify it, or be played off against it, and so forth. And as in

music the 'colourings' available, which is to say the nuances of meaning available, are diverse and multiple.

It may seem that to explicate the logic of these loose concepts by means of metaphor - and a musical one at that - is to use the opaque to clarify the unclear. Isn't it the very nature of such things as musical expression and meaning that are in question here? What understanding is gained of aesthetic discourse if it is compared with the mysterious processes of music? It is here that the Aristotle's injunction against the pursuit of more clarity than is feasible is relevant⁴⁰. The point of the musical metaphor is to suggest that meanings do not accumulate mechanically, but are like flavours, which interact extremely subtly and with great sensitivity to the immediate environment. The further question: But how does that work? is out of place: the process is subtle, and that is the whole point. When it is appreciated how instinctive and complex are the workings of language the desire to capture everything in formulae and rules will fade. In any case, two important points have emerged from the discussion thus far: first, it has been demonstrated that although a loose concept such as 'intelligent' cannot be strictly defined it is nonetheless governed by conditions; second, an insight has been gained into how concepts act upon one another and generate extremely rich and varied meanings. Something more will be said concerning this in the next chapter. The question now is whether there are any condition-governed aesthetic terms.

An example of a condition-governed aesthetic term is 'understatement'. Obviously, we cannot give a list of necessary-and-sufficient conditions which a piece of understated writing must meet. A definition of this sort would have to take into account the subject matter and the range of reactions appropriate to it; the fine nuances of meaning conveyed by felicitous placing of words, phrases, punctuation; and so forth. (It is unlikely that the definition: 'Understatement is a style of writing in which the dramatic and important is stressed less than would have been expected...' would satisfy Anne Sheppard.) But is the term condition-governed at all? Are there no circumstances in which it may be said to be incorrect to describe something as 'understated'? Is it possible, for example, to say that *The Sun* newspaper employs understatement in its leader articles? Wouldn't such an ascription be totally incorrect? And if it is incorrect to say of *The Sun* that its reporting is understated (or, for that matter, restrained, balanced, objective) may it not also be incorrect to say the same of, e.g., a poem? For the question whether the emotion expressed in a work of art is understated may be a very significant aesthetic question. For instance, a reader who considers the stories of Chekov dull may be brought to a wholly different understanding when it is pointed out that in Chekov there is a great deal of drama beneath the surface of the narrative. Someone who fails to perceive the understatement in Chekov has simply misunderstood him, has made an error of judgement no less clear than if he had attributed restraint or understatement to the leader-writers of *The Sun*. So the concept of understatement,

without doubt an important aesthetic term, is condition-governed in some sense.

But what if the reader of *The Sun* insists that, for him, the newspaper is understated? Shouldn't we say that he is not free to maintain this? For then, we should argue, all political speeches, propaganda, and factual reports are understated, or restrained, no matter what language they are couched in - and this is patently untrue. I.e., if *The Sun* is understated and restrained then virtually everything else is too. To say that the term 'understatement' or 'restraint' or 'balance' can be applied correctly to *The Sun* newspaper would be to destroy, wholesale, all the distinctions that we are accustomed to drawing between styles of reporting. The Sun is, we might say, an exemplar of what we mean when we say that a piece of reporting is *not* restrained, balanced, understated. We might say: This, and things like this, is what we mean by unrestrained partisan reporting⁴¹.

So here is at least one condition-governed aesthetic term. And, of course, there are many more. Aesthetic concepts share the indeterminate logic of many other concepts in language. Thus something stronger than an analogy can be drawn between the way in which many family-resemblance concepts extend to cover various cases and the way in which aesthetic terms extend to cover various cases⁴². Something may be said here, then, about Anne Sheppard's requirement: that it be shown how aesthetic judgements relate to factual judgements, how they can be compared, supported, justified,

and so forth. The relation between an aesthetic term and a factual judgement is not well-described as one where the factual judgement is first on the scene and the aesthetic judgement comes along later. Often, as with 'understatement' and *The Sun*, the aesthetic concept is learned in the presence of and with the aid of examples or instances. Therefore, the aesthetic concept is not taught in the form: anything that fits this factual description can also be called 'elegant', 'understated', etc. It is taught in the form: this, and things like this, are elegant...And so forth.

However, a dischordant note is struck, it seems, by the observation that aesthetic concepts pack an evaluative punch in addition to a descriptive one. In other words, normal concepts just describe the world, while aesthetic concepts both describe and evaluate it. The non-cognitivist may seek to press this distinction in something like the following way.

Suppose that I have two coffee-mugs before me. One is taller, more slender, less angular than the other. From such a description we might be inclined to say that the tall mug is more *elegant* than the other. But, of course, as with 'understatement', we are not logically bound to say this. We might say that the elegance of the mug is 'loosely entailed' by its height, width, proportions, and shape. And that would be to say that these features *count towards* the elegance of the mug but do not *strictly entail* its elegance. I.e., an object may be elegant and lacking these features, or it may have these features and still not be

elegant (think what makes a mug elegant and what makes a string-quartet or a mathematical proof elegant). But if the mug is elegant it is in virtue of these and similar features. Now, it is important that were I to ask someone else to hazard a guess at which of the mugs I thought most elegant he would in all likelihood identify the tall thin mug. We could imagine him saying: 'If either of the mugs can be called elegant - and it's an open question whether either of them really is elegant - then it is the tall thin mug'.

Now consider a slightly different case. I think the tall thin mug 'elegant'. But my companion, thinking the mug *too* tall and *too* thin, describes it as 'etiolated'. Now one account of our disagreement might be that I perceive the slimness of the first mug and, *finding the impression agreeable*, choose the word 'elegant' to describe it. This term suggests the major features of the mug - its height and its thinness - as well as the positive attitude that I have towards it. My companion acknowledges the slimness too, but, *finding the impression disagreeable*, chooses the term 'spindly' or 'etiolated' to describe it. This term also suggests the major features of the mug - its height and its slimness - as well as the negative attitude of my companion. Both the term 'elegant' and the term 'etiolated' are entailed, in the loose way suggested above, by the height, width, proportions and shape of the coffee-mug. But the looseness of the entailment accomodates contrary evaluations.

We may be inclined, therefore, to say that these aesthetic terms communicate two things: first, something about the world (the mug is correctly characterized as tall and slim); second, something about the observer/evaluator (the mug is agreeable to one but not to the other). Thus aesthetic terms, or terms in their aesthetic use, may be said to have two 'dimensions' or strands. The first is a fact-stating dimension. The second is an emotive dimension. The two may be peeled apart. The terms 'elegant' and 'etiolated' may both identify the same salient features of the mug, but they signal different attitudes towards these features.

Now, on this assumption, it is plain that the terms 'elegant' and 'etiolated', in so far as they communicate something about the world (in so far as they are condition-governed), can be said to be, within reason, true or false. For suppose that we show a third party the two mugs, and he says that he believes our dispute to be about the squat mug. We should in such a situation want to know how on earth the terms 'etiolated' and 'elegant' may be applied to the squat mug. We should say that, even on the assumption that a purely evaluative element enters into the choice of the terms 'elegant' and 'etiolated', there is enough descriptive content to make some ascriptions of elegance or etiolation quite ridiculous and inadmissible (in precisely the same way that a description of *The Sun* newspaper as restrained and understated is both ridiculous and inadmissible).

So: evaluative terms can be shown to have, at the least, a descriptive aspect. It is surely not possible to apply the term 'elegant', without qualification, to anything at all. The great majority of ascriptions of elegance will undoubtedly be intelligible - 'I can see what you mean' - though some will elicit the response: 'I can't see that at all'. Certain applications of the term will amount to a misuse of the concept. And whether a misuse has occurred will be determined by other competent users of the language. I cannot just say: 'Well, I think it's elegant, even if no-one else does; my feelings on the matter are incontrovertible'. In such a situation it may be suggested to me that I use another term to express my admiration or my liking. If, for example, I have said that I think the Tay Rail Bridge 'elegant' I may be persuaded to accept the term 'imposing' instead. I may be told: 'Whatever you see in the bridge it can't properly be called elegance; if the Tay Rail Bridge is elegant then *The Sun* newspaper is restrained and objective...' (The Tay Rail Bridge is, we might say, too far off the paradigm cases of elegance to sit easily under that expression). I may, however, eventually build some elegance-making features (terms from the elegance-clique or family) around my description of the bridge, suggesting perhaps that the structure is 'majestically imposing, spare and unostentatious, etc, etc.' These concepts will not go against a thing's being elegant, and could in some circumstances lead quite directly to a thing's being called elegant, but they will be concepts more at home than is 'elegant' with other concepts that might apply to the bridge; e.g., 'stolid', 'monumental', 'spartan', 'functional', etc.

However, such modification may only proceed so far. There will come a point where the most significant features of an object will sit easily with a range of descriptive terms at my disposal. And the idea (already mentioned) that now comes to the fore is that I can use the descriptive terms available to me to express a range of evaluations - for it surely cannot be that the only terms I am left with to describe an object are terms allowing only one evaluation.

Chapter Three.

The suggestion to which this chapter is addressed is that aesthetics has to do with the disposition of the will. Aesthetic concepts express, at least in part, dispositions of the will. Here, it is argued, lies the greatest difference between aesthetic concepts and concepts such as 'red' and 'sour'. The considerations of the previous chapter have, according to the non-cognitivist, shown only that some of the features of aesthetic activity are governed by conditions; but it has not been shown that aesthetic judgements are wholly condition-governed. The non-cognitivist will admit that some aesthetic judgements are indeed inadmissible - but this is because such judgements will indicate conceptual incompetence rather than because the judgement, the evaluation itself, is incorrect.

The present chapter, then, develops and illustrates a number of the ideas introduced in the last chapter. For there it was suggested that aesthetic concepts, no less than other concepts, are governed by conditions. That the conditions under which a concept applies cannot be neatly formalized (as is the case with most aesthetic concepts) is not to say that the concept is applied arbitrarily, that there is no saying when it is correctly applied, or when one application is more or less justified than another. And it was suggested that, like paints on a palette or notes in a scale, concepts can be deployed in such combinations as to achieve many and varied semantical effects. These ideas are considered

further in this chapter. On the one hand there is illustration, by way of examples, of how concepts are in fact deployed - when they are brought in to play, how they are used to influence evaluation, to narrow range of reference, to achieve precision, and so forth. On the other hand there is discussion of the logical relations between the disposition of the will, i.e., the aesthetic evaluation, and the reasons that support it. Reasons, I shall argue, support a judgement of value in virtue of the fact that they provide a criterion of the evaluation in question. This view stands opposed to the view that a reason supports an evaluation only in the sense that the reason specifies what it is that is being coupled with a pro-attitude to yield the evaluation. The former view says that the nature of my liking for, say, Shakespeare is indicated by the reasons I shall give: my reasons express my evaluation. The latter view says that it is what I like about Shakespeare that is indicated by my reasons: my reasons report my evaluation. On the former view, if I disagree with someone's evaluation of an object I do not share his particular conception of it. On the latter view I do not share his pro-attitude towards it. The crucial difference between these views is that whereas a conception of things is malleable, subject to alteration in the light of reason (in other words it is rational - it is a part of rationality), a pro-attitude is intractable. On the former view aesthetics may be seen as a manifestation of rationality. On the latter view aesthetics lies somewhere outside the sphere of rationality.

I

The conclusion thus far (as the sceptic might be inclined to see it) is that aesthetic terms do indeed describe the world, but due to their evaluative overtones they do not describe the world uncontroversially, as, e.g., colour-terms do. If I see that something is red I simply choose the correct term and pronounce it red. But if I see that something is tall and thin *and* if I feel well-disposed to the tallness and thinness in this context (in the context of this object) I shall choose the semi-descriptive, semi-evaluative/expressive term 'elegant'⁴³.

An issue implicit in an earlier discussion (pp. 31-34) comes to the fore here, namely, the relation between aesthetic responses and emotions. One of the difficulties that the non-cognitivist account of aesthetic value encountered before was that, on an account of aesthetic concepts in terms of emotional responses, to say 'this is elegant' seems tantamount to saying 'this gives me the elegant-feeling'. Attention is focussed on the feelings of the observer rather than on the objects under appraisal. And, feelings being what they are, i.e., non-cognitive, brute, essentially unconstrained by the real world⁴⁴, it was not possible to explain why, in any aesthetic description (e.g., this mug is *etiolated*, indeed *spindly*, like a *gangly adolescent*...), one term rather than another is selected, and selected with such care; why aesthetic discussions often involve the use of very fine distinctions; why aesthetic disputes seem to rely upon closely reasoned arguments,

arguments knit together by an informal logic like that found in everyday disputes; and so forth.

The account here outlined would appear to solve this problem. For to say that something is elegant is not to say that it arouses an elegant-feeling. It is to give a general description of the object - it is tall, thin, delicate, etc - in terms that express a positive attitude towards the object. That is to say that various features of aesthetic discourse - the particularity of the language, the logical fabric of aesthetic argument, and so on - may be attributed to the descriptive or fact-stating dimension of aesthetic language. The emotional (or affective) input need not be considered responsible for the complexity of aesthetic discussion. It need not be thought that the *emotions* involved are such as to allow skilled and detailed argument. For it can be claimed that when people discuss aesthetics they are discussing the applicability of various concepts, seeking to find those which are most apt in the circumstances, but ultimately different evaluations may be expressed according to whether, in the end, the disputants respond differently - have, so to speak, different emotional constitutions. The sceptic can, on this account, eat his cake and have it. To aesthetic discussion may be granted a portion of rationality, while the basic point - that *value* is non-rational remains unchallenged.

At the end of the last chapter I said that one account of the difference between the man who considers a coffee-mug elegant and

the man who considers the same coffee-mug etiolated is that the mug arouses approval in the one man and disapproval in the other. This account stands opposed to the idea, which I favour, that one of the men has in fact misperceived some aspect of the mug. There is, in other words, no logical requirement that the mug be recognized as either elegant or etiolated. One man may persuade the other man to concur with his judgement, but this will no doubt involve psychological trickery - suggestion, persuasive definition, cajolery, and the like - rather than instruments of rationality. In what follows I shall question the adequacy of this account. In particular I shall be looking at whether it is correct to characterize the means by which one man influences the evaluation of the other as 'psychological trickery', i.e., as essentially non-rational.

It would appear expedient to begin by looking a little more closely at the nature and extent of the rationality (and irrationality) that is said on this account to enter into aesthetics. Consider, then, the following aesthetic disputes. In the first the question is whether the Tay Rail Bridge is elegant; in the second the question is whether the wine-glasses that comprise a set of glasses are elegant. It is significant that in the first dispute, as in disputes involving bridges generally, there may be a question over whether the concept 'elegant' (and its near-relatives) has any place at all in the description of the bridge. That is to say that in this discussion there is a place for the question whether any reasonable person - whether anyone who

is aware of the meaning of his utterances - could call the bridge elegant. In the dispute over the wine-glasses, however, the question is whether, in particular, 'elegant', rather than 'etiolated' or 'spindly' and the like, applies. It may be obvious to the disputants how the wine-glasses might be construed as elegant - and also how they might be construed as etiolated or spindly. But the question whether it is at all reasonable to apply the concept 'elegant' (or its near relatives) is out of place⁴⁵. For wine-glasses are just the sort of things to which the concept 'elegant' applies.

So if someone were to describe the bridge as elegant (or, better, 'delicate' - in the aesthetic sense of the term) we should say that he was mad. It would be very difficult to construe the bridge as either elegant or delicate - the bridge is the sort of thing to which we should point and say: 'Here is an example of an object lacking in both elegance and delicacy...' But, as mentioned, there is no problem about the wine-glasses. If we were trying to explain to someone what 'delicate' or 'elegant' meant we should very likely give wine-glasses, or things like wine-glasses (ornaments, chandeliers, structures supported by slender stems, etc), as examples. Thus there is really no difficulty to the question: Of the Tay Rail Bridge and a set of wine-glasses which is the more elegant or more delicate? The competent user of the language will reply that, by and large, the wine-glasses are better described as elegant or delicate than the Tay Rail Bridge.

However, the question arises: when it comes to wine-glasses, which are generally considered delicate and elegant, how do we decide which are the delicate and elegant among them? A huge, stolid, angular structure like the Tay Rail Bridge is not elegant - so the argument runs - because 'elegant' just does not apply to such structures. And it is not delicate for the same reason (see ch. 2, pp. 16-18). But wine-glasses are just the sort of things to which these concepts apply. So how can we withhold these terms from any wine-glasses, and how can we talk intelligibly about the extent to which these terms apply to particular kinds of wine-glass? The sceptical answer is that here personal preference comes into play. If any wine-glass may be described as elegant, or whatever, it is described so under the influence of feeling. For *conceptual competence* can only be pressed so far. Beyond a certain point it is impossible to argue that a concept such as 'elegant' or 'delicate' is applied rightly or wrongly. According to the sceptical position that point is reached in a case like that of the wine-glasses. That wine-glass is elegant, therefore, that arouses a positive feeling when its elegant-making features are considered. (Those same features, arousing a negative feeling, would lead to the glass being described as etiolated or spindly and the like.)

To put this another way: reasons are brought forth for withholding the term 'elegant' from the Tay Rail Bridge. These will mention the size of the bridge, its mass and solidity, its angular shape, its squat stolidness, and so forth. These features, generally, run counter to elegance and its cognates. But what sort

of reasons might justify withholding the term 'elegant' from an inelegant (or so we think) set of wine-glasses? Is the structure of reasoning in the latter case, in so far as we can discern it, similar to the reasoning involved in the case of the bridge? According to the view under consideration there is a considerable difference. Reasons, on this account, may be given for withholding the term 'elegant' or the term 'delicate' from the Tay Rail Bridge because the bridge is too far off the beaten track of elegant objects for the concept to be correctly applied there. But no reasons may be given for withholding the term from a set of wine-glasses. For wine-glasses, at least in comparison with the bridge, are clear candidates for description by means of the term 'elegant' or by means of the term 'delicate'. So why, in the case of the wine-glasses, 'etiolated' or 'spindly' rather than 'elegant' is used is down to the ungoverned emotions of the evaluator. At this level, so the argument goes, no-one can reasonably question the use of one term rather than another. Thus, on this account, the rationality of an aesthetic discussion proceeds only so far. Gross questions - questions, we might say, of *competence* rather than *taste* - may be settled without much trouble. But questions of taste cannot be settled at all. Here, no reason is better than another.

The man who insists upon using a concept in the oddest of circumstances, then, can be said not to grasp, i.e., not to be competent in the use of, the concept. Such is the likely verdict on the man who calls the Tay Rail Bridge elegant. But the man who

appears roughly competent in the use of aesthetic concepts can only ever be convicted of bad taste. He does not, that is, fail to meet any of the requirements of rationality. He is merely of a different 'emotional constitution' from his fellows⁴¹⁵.

The story of the way in which an aesthetic term is selected, then, runs something like this. There are two versions. In the first a range of commendatory terms is considered initially. This excludes all terms with negative overtones. Thus, from the start, the positive evaluation is expressed. Now, of the commendatory terms only a small subset will properly apply to the object under consideration. For example, if the object towards which I feel well-disposed is a bridge I can bring to the fore certain complimentary aesthetic terms. I could put forward a whole rash of these at random, e.g., 'elegant', 'impressive', 'well-proportioned', 'monolithic', 'intricate', 'graceful', and so on. But only some of these terms will properly refer to the bridge. Thus my expression of a positive evaluation is tempered - it may be better to say *given direction* - by the fact that many aesthetic terms have descriptive connotations. My evaluation, therefore, is yoked to a description. (In paraphrase of Dr. Johnson: the logic of aesthetic discourse is a consequence of evaluation on the one hand and description on the other being 'yoked by violence together'...) In the second version a rash of aesthetic terms, expressing both positive and negative evaluations, is narrowed down initially by appeal to the normal extension of the terms. Thus the descriptive aspect of the concepts is involved from the outset. If

the object of my attention is again the bridge I can tender a number of descriptions, e.g., 'imposing', 'unsightly', 'inspiring', 'monolithic', and so on. (Note the absence of terms that do not easily apply, e.g., 'elegant', 'delicate', 'sensitive'.) After the preliminary cull there will be a range of feasible positive and negative terms. The final choice is made on the basis of feeling. Thus, once a family of concepts is identified and vetted for applicability, we choose between them, supposedly, on the basis of which of the concepts expresses the emotional response that we have. The two versions of the story present essentially the same picture. Ultimately, the evaluation and the description take place in parallel, and are yoked together in the aesthetic term. In both procedures rationality stops short of governing the choice of term completely. [It might be worth noting that the discussion thus far has concentrated upon verbal description and appraisal of aesthetic objects. But there are more aesthetic activities than just describing objects and giving voice to evaluations. *Actions* may also give expression to aesthetic perceptions. The way in which I read (aloud) a poem, for example, will indicate the way in which I understand it. Likewise, the way in which I play a piece of music will disclose how I am inclined to view it. Therefore, we could say, in line with the foregoing comments about verbalized judgements, that some of our actions concerning aesthetic objects will be condition-governed, e.g., hanging a painting on a wall rather than eating from it - if you eat from it you do not, it is to be supposed, understand what a painting is - and some actions will be ungoverned, e.g., hanging a painting on one wall rather

than another, displaying it alongside these paintings rather than these, and so on. That is to say that it will be argued that reasons may be employed against eating from a painting: either treat it as it is supposed to be treated or refrain from calling it a painting. But no reasons may be mobilized against hanging a painting in one way rather than another and in one context rather than another.^{47]}

To sum up, then. We could say that in the case of the bridge conceptual competence is at issue; while in the case of the wine-glasses taste is at issue. This is one way at least of formulating the view that the final arbitrar between aesthetic terms in difficult cases is free-floating emotion, or taste. Concepts are held in check up to a point, but there is a wide margin in which personal feeling operates and is decisive. There is, then, a considerable shady area, where competence is not in question but taste is. The larger part of aesthetic activity, it is argued, takes place within this shady area.

But the question arises: what happens when the transition is made between competence and taste? Does taste enter when rules give out (however rules are to be understood, e.g., as shared norms - an account I am inclined to favour)? Is it that taste governs where the rules have nothing to say? Are the rules governing closely-related concepts (elegant, waspish, etiolated, delicate) just more complex and more subtle than the rules governing very different concepts? Are they less clear in meaning? Is it just

that we cannot apply them with such confidence? The answer to these questions will have a direct bearing on the rationality of aesthetics.

Roughly, it is claimed that it is a matter of competence whether a wine-glass is to be described as more elegant than a bridge. But it is claimed, on the other hand, that it is a matter of taste, of ungoverned emotion, whether one glass is more elegant than another. However, whether one glass is more elegant than another can be construed as a matter of conceptual competence if the notion of competence is not unduly restricted. In fact the sceptical account outlined above does not do justice to the complexity of aesthetic reasoning. When I am asked why I like something I may be at a loss for words. More often, however, I shall give reasons, point to features of the object which make it interesting, and so forth. Thus the picture presented by the sceptic does not ring true. At the very least it needs to be given more sophistication. Perhaps the conditions governing aesthetic concepts penetrate deeper than the sceptic allows. In that case a greater concession to the rationality of aesthetics is granted. For the more extensive the conditions governing the application of an aesthetic term the more 'sense' can be attributed to aesthetic discussion. Indeed, the idea that emotion enters the fine-tuning of choice of terms may only be maintained if a blind eye is turned to the true nature of aesthetic discussion or if slovenliness prevents the true nature of aesthetic discussion from being appreciated. In what follows I shall suggest that reasons - or

issues of conceptual competence - in aesthetics do indeed extend further than the sceptic supposes.

II

If we are asked to indicate which, of the bridge and the wine-glass, is the more elegant we should invariably choose the glass. We could give reasons - the bridge is large, and elegance is associated with smallness, neatness, delicacy (which does not itself exclude large things but sits very well with small and fragile objects); the bridge is angular in construction, and elegance is commonly found in objects that exhibit grace - which quality involves, frequently, curves, a blurring of extremes, a sense of fluidity, and so forth; the bridge has a compactness and a functionality about it - there is no flamboyance or panache, no imagination, in the structure - and the lack of a little flair militates against elegance; and so on. On the other hand the typical wine-glass is small, delicate, fragile, curved, intricate, etc. It is small wonder, therefore, that the wine-glass is more readily pronounced elegant than the bridge. (This is said to be a question of conceptual competence.) Note, however, that if the bridge participating in the comparison were not the Tay Rail Bridge, but the San Francisco Golden Gate Bridge, or some similar cable-suspension bridge (the Forth Road Bridge might serve just as well, or the Kessock Bridge over the Moray Firth...), we should be less confident in our pronouncement. For the Golden Gate is graced

by gentle curves, by soaring metalwork, by a method of construction that directs attention away from the purely functional aspects of the structure. It is not too difficult, therefore, to make out a case for the elegance of the Golden Gate⁴⁸.

Now if asked to identify the more elegant between a pair of wine-glasses how should we proceed? Is it really plausible to suggest, as the sceptical account seems inclined to suggest, that we should either be stuck here or that we should settle upon the glass that, inexplicably, we 'warm to' most? Is this really the point where reasons give out? (And by reasons I mean considerations that the general run of people will find rationally persuasive or acceptable.) It seems quite clear that there is in fact still a great deal of room for manoeuvre here, still room for the giving of reasons, for presenting a cogent case - still room, in fact, for questions of conceptual competence to arise. It is not unreasonable to suppose that in the case of the wine-glasses a procedure akin to that outlined above for the Golden Gate Bridge would be followed. We should favour the wine-glass that exhibits most clearly elegance-making qualities. Thus the more robust-looking of the glasses might seem too coarse, lacking delicacy and fragility; the more curvaceous of the glasses may well win on account of grace; the more visually interesting might triumph - so long as it does not encrust itself in ornament; and so forth. The idea that emerges is that although we might learn the concept of elegance in conjunction with objects such as wine-glasses (rather than in conjunction with bridges or mountains) we are not thereby

forced to call all wine-glasses elegant. We are not thereby left without the means of discriminating rationally between the elegant and the inelegant, or the more or less elegant, amongst what seem to be quintessentially elegant objects. For we do not learn the concept of elegance by means of wine-glasses, or one class of elegant objects, alone. We have a whole host of exemplars, from Artic Terns to Aphorisms, from tennis serves to avalanches. (Of course, these things are not elegant in their entirety. They each illustrate a way in which the concept 'elegant' may be exemplarily applied. Thus, the wings of the Artic Tern - long, thin, scyth-like - are elegant; but it is the majestic descent of the avalanche - seen from afar, to be sure - that is elegant.) When we come to determine which of two wine-glasses is the more elegant we bring into play our comprehensive understanding of the concept as it is expressed in our exemplars. When we argue in favour of one glass over another we shall compare it first to this exemplar and then to that, we shall seek to bring concepts from the elegance-family to bear (delicate, fine, graceful, slight, petite, etc), and shall to this end bring in another range of exemplars. Of course, this is not a rigorous activity. We cannot *prove* that what we call elegance in the wing of an artic tern and in the movement of an avalanche is there to be beheld in the wine-glass. We can no more do this than *prove* that a given expansion of the function '+2' goes on in the same way as before. For the proof rests upon no more firm a foundation than that of which it is a proof. (See ch. 2, pp. 65/66. See also Nelson Goodman on the subject of rules of inference in *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast*, ch. 3 - 'The New Problem

of Induction'.) But that is not to say that there is no saying whether one object is more elegant than another, any more than it is to say that we cannot determine whether, in any case, the operation '+2' has been carried out correctly.

I introduced the idea that concepts in language interact like basic elements of music in chapter 2 in order to suggest the range of 'colours', nuances of meaning, available to the language-user. The idea is useful here, too, in order to suggest the way in which concepts may be extended and modified to cover new cases.

At this point, however, it might be objected that the real issue has not yet been confronted. The real issue is that there is an evaluative aspect to aesthetic concepts: aesthetic terms are frequently terms of commendation or condemnation. To ignore this aspect of aesthetic talk would be to ignore what, for some, is the most prominent feature of aesthetic activity⁴⁷. However much it may be argued that aesthetic terms are descriptive of the world, and however much it may be argued that aesthetic terms, no less than terms like 'red' and 'sour', are governed by conditions or criteria, and however much complexity may be attributed to aesthetic concepts, there is nonetheless an aspect of aesthetics that relates to, for want of a better term, *motivation*. Aesthetics is not just about describing objects (although a great deal of it is); it is about assessing whether this object goes well with that object, whether this object is more worthy of attention than that object, whether an object is worth bothering about at all. In

other words aesthetics is about attitudes towards aesthetic objects: aesthetics, we might say, interests itself in the disposition of our will⁶⁰ with regard to aesthetic objects. Here, it is argued, lies the nub of the issue.

The original sceptical question may now re-emerge, modified but essentially unscathed: can we argue rationally the merits and demerits of aesthetic objects? What qualities are to be aesthetically preferred? Which objects are worth an expenditure of time, money, and effort? - and then how much? In short, how are we to dispose our will with regard to aesthetic objects? Conceptual competence, it is argued, is not the issue here. Knowing how to use a concept no more tells you how to align your will than knowing how to multiply tells you how (to what end) you are to employ your multiplicative skills. The discussion up till now has concentrated upon the extent to which we are obliged to describe objects in this way or that. But it has failed to address the issue of how we are to dispose our will with regard to these objects. The question of how objects are to be evaluated, since it is not governed by logical conditions, is, it is argued, to be referred to individual taste, to personal preference.

One author, Peter Kivy, in a monograph called *Speaking of Art*, suggests that aesthetic dispute does in the end come down to personal preference, to issues of individual taste, but insists that the important fact is *where* and *when* in a discussion this point is reached. This, I suppose, is designed to indicate that an

impasse may only be accepted as such once the issue has been thrashed out, and both parties are sure that their difference rests upon a genuine inequality of taste rather than a misperception of the issue by one of the two parties⁵¹. Thus, a dispute over the merits of Chekov has not come to rest on an issue of taste if one of the disputants insists that Chekov is dull because he is interested only in small details of Russian life, that his writings are simple tales of garden-parties and unruffled aristocratic society, and so on. For this claim rests upon a misperception of Chekov. But, of course, discovering that Chekov involves an almost subliminal drama may not lead the critic to revise his opinion of Chekov - he might just reformulate his objection, reformulate the expression of his taste: he might say that he has discovered, via Chekov, that he likes his drama to be out in the open, ostentatious, Wagnerian and romantic. But isn't it now clear that the discussion has entered a different dimension? I.e., the issue can no longer be said to be an insular aesthetic issue. The discussion now is over the merits and demerits of, say, romantic passion in art (and life) as against, say, classical reserve. Or the dispute may now be traceable to general philosophical (political? moral?) differences. Thus the issue of aesthetic preference will very likely draw very broad issues into the reckoning. Is the stance taken on these issues also dictated by personal preference, by ungoverned taste?

I shall leave this question for the moment. (But I shall have something to say on the issue presently. For the moment I

refer back to the first chapter, which touched upon a global scepticism about values in human affairs.) It is here necessary only to note that the disposition of the will with regard to particular objects - paintings, colour-schemes, hairstyles, wine-glasses - is not independent of the disposition of the will in general; or, to put that another way, the disposition of the will in general is reflected in, expressed in, the particular judgement.

The aesthetic assessment, therefore, cannot realistically be seen as a mysteriously disembodied judgement. All too often expressions of taste are isolated, or amputated, from the wider concerns from which they gather sense. And it is little wonder that the aesthetic judgement, sometimes artificially forced into the mould of simple appraisal (having to do with ranking objects according to their appeal), appears mysterious, without origins or genealogy, and without the support that attends the majority of matter-of-fact judgements, such as that the moon is not made of green cheese. Indeed, the comparison with belief is instructive. As mentioned in the first chapter (pp. 15/16), a sceptical question may arise regarding individual beliefs, namely, how can they be justified. When inspected in isolation a belief frequently seems well-nigh unfounded. For example, if the car does not start on a rainy morning why do I conclude that the spark-plugs, or one of a limited set of other possibilities, are to blame? Might it not be that the engine has been stolen since last I used the car, or that the laws of nature governing the combustion of petrol have, overnight, undergone a radical change? Why don't I consider these

possibilities? Is it that I am unimaginative, or too lazy to consider the full range of possibilities, or too stupid? For surely I cannot be certain that these hypotheses are wrong. (Even the argument that *probably* the laws of nature are the same as the day before is insufficient to justify my convictions, if Hume's arguments on the subject are to be credited.) The familiar manoeuvre against such ideas is to point out that we do not hold beliefs singly, nor do we acquire or corroborate them singly. We believe a host of things, and it is within a vast framework of beliefs that we operate. Likewise, an aesthetic judgement has its place within a vast network of judgements and beliefs. It derives support from everything else within this structure. An aesthetic judgement, like a belief, *implicates* other judgements and rests upon, is supported by, other judgements - and if one judgement is spurious, in the sense that it is not governed by conditions, then all judgements of this sort must be counted as similarly spurious.

Barring the most general scepticism, then, is the doubt that there is nothing to say on the subject of how the will is to be aligned with regard to various objects met?

Take the wine-glass that I find displeasing. It is important to remember that I shall have to find words to articulate what I find displeasing about the glass. I shall have to counter the suggestion, for example, that the stem of the glass be related to the stem of a rose, the globe related to a dew-drop, and so on. These images may not impress me. But I shall have to respond

either with indifference - I have no opinion on these wine-glasses one way or the other - or with a negative view. I shall say: it's top-heavy, and if the stem were the stem of a rose it would droop or snap; it's over-decorated (in fact 'over-decorated' is not good enough - my companion might just deny this; it's necessary to suggest how much decoration is *appropriate...*); the globe may have the shape and sparkle of a clear dew-drop but it is here overblown, bloated, fit to burst; and so on. (How are these views, these descriptions, these images, interwoven - if 'interwoven' they are - with my feelings? Do these images and my evaluation fit together only in the sense that for some strange reason⁵² I simply happen to find these images attractive?)

It is significant that I could *bring someone to see* the glass as top-heavy. I might, for example, say that the glass ought to present a balanced feel, a look of effortless support, a sense of forces finely-balanced - all of these like a good throwing-knife, a ballerina, an eagle - and if I can bring these pictures to the forefront of his mind he may begin to see the imbalance of the glass. I can lend plausibility to these pictures rather than others by talking about wine-glasses in a broad context: the glass should allow the colour of the wine to show clearly, allow, too, the smell of the wine to accompany the taste, and the contours of the glass ought to fit the hand comfortably, etc⁵³. The force of the 'ought' in 'the glass ought to be finely-balanced like a good throwing-knife' derives from the plausibility of the idea that the glass is to be handled like an instrument and considered in the

light of its weight, etc. The force of the 'ought' in 'the glass ought to allow the colour of the wine to show clearly' derives from the plausibility of the idea that wine-drinking involves the spectacle of wine itself, that a wine-glass ought to be shaped such as to bend light in a pleasing manner, lending the wine a sparkle, and so forth. If I can make out a good case for the images I favour - and making out a good case involves bringing to bear a comprehensive range of considerations, parallels with other cases (e.g., 'if you were buying cutlery you might pay attention, for reasons no less aesthetic than practical, to the feel of the knives and forks - so why not judge wine-glasses by a similar criterion?'), analogies, and the like - I can bring my opponent to share my assessment, or if not share my assessment at least see the justice in it. The point is that if my opponent begins to see the glass in the way I suggest he can no longer find it pleasing. (Consider seeing a line in a poem first as an instance of irony and then as a crass blunder: a line which once pleased can please no longer. Or consider seeing a way of life, e.g., stoical resignation, first as noble and then as foolish and base/immoral, e.g., 'I used to think the Christian idea of turning the other cheek extremely cowardly and foolish, but I see now that it is an expression of great courage and great wisdom...')

Thus, by various strategems⁵⁴ I can bring my companion to see the glass in terms that oblige him to see it as top-heavy. The ways in which my companion may combat my view are of course varied. He might say that, yes, the glasses are top-heavy, but...and go on

to introduce considerations which redeem top-heaviness. And, of course, he may match me image for image, thinking more in terms of full-petalled roses and clear dew-drops than throwing-knives and ballerinas. Whether one set of images is more apt than the other is an issue of wider scope. (Perhaps, as Peter Kivy envisages, the dispute will come to rest on an ineradicable difference of opinion, a difference in the metaphors that each party to the dispute finds congenial.)

But an idea has been introduced here that may seem to stand in need of elucidation, namely, the idea that a way of seeing is connected to an evaluation and that an evaluation can be influenced by a kind of suggestion, a presenting of persuasive images, a strategic presentation of metaphors, analogies, and parallels - in short a whole battery of devices that are not sanctioned by conventional logic. What sort of argument and what sort of proof have we here? What is the precise meaning of the metaphors 'bringing someone to see', 'bringing an image to the forefront of his mind', 'seeing the glass as a balance of forces, like a throwing-knife', and the like? How are they related to evaluation? And where does this leave the rationality of aesthetics?

It is to this that I now turn.

III

There are, it seems to me, two issues here. The first concerns the notion that a way of seeing is connected to, wedded to, an evaluation. The second concerns the notion that 'ways of seeing', hence evaluations, can be influenced by various means (the 'strategies' that I spoke of earlier). The first idea bears upon the sceptical view that perception of an object and an evaluation are separated by a gulf, bridgeable only by a pro-attitude, which is, unlike the perception, rationally ungoverned. The second idea bears upon the view that one evaluation is as good as another and that evaluations do not admit of rational appraisal or mutual modification. There is, to be sure, a relation between the views. If an alternative to the first idea proves supportable then there is scope for a better account of reason-giving in aesthetics: if an evaluation is logically related to a certain conception of an object - which is accessible via reasons (via metaphors, images, analogies, instructive parallels, and so on) - then an evaluation, too, is accessible.

The idea that there is a way of seeing the world that is so to speak steeped in value figures in a paper by John McDowell⁵⁵. The view that McDowell argues against is one most familiar from moral philosophy, but is nonetheless relevant to aesthetics. For that to which he is opposed is a view about what is required in order for the will to be disposed one way rather than another. It is the view that - and here I use terms culled from McDowell's

presentation of the issue - motivation arises from a pro-attitude (a desire) that exists over and above a state of the cognitive apparatus of the agent. It is McDowell's contention that, on the contrary, it is often sufficient, to render an agent's motivation intelligible, to advert to his conception of how things are: motivation arises directly from (McDowell says 'flows from') the agent's special conception of his circumstances; no desire need be introduced to supplement the agent's conception. Says McDowell: "[T]he agent's conception of the situation, properly understood, suffices to show us the favourable light in which his action appeared to him." (p.16). McDowell argues, in effect, that evaluation, the disposition of the will, is a cognitive state, a state of the cognitive equipment (or, at any rate, it figures in the logic of psychological descriptions as a cognitive state). Value, on this account, is not an ingredient in addition to a conception of an object. There are not two independently accessible data here, the evaluation on the one hand and the (value-neutral) conception of the object on the other. The counterpart in aesthetics of the view to which McDowell is opposed is of course the view, featured in the last section, that an aesthetic judgement involves a state of the will quite apart from, i.e., over and above, a state of the cognitive equipment. That is the view that what is really at issue is a disposition to value objects, and that this is quite independent from the way in which objects are described⁵⁶.

McDowell's argument trades upon the fact that desires are attributed to agents as part of the enterprise of rendering their actions intelligible (showing how the action appeared to them in a favourable light) only in certain circumstances. Often we attribute a desire to someone on the grounds that they are *in fact* motivated in a certain way - but the desire in such cases does not add anything to the specification of or explanation of the action. Says McDowell: "If we credit him [the agent] with a suitable desire, then...that need be no more than a consequence of the fact that we take his conception of the circumstances to have been his reason for acting as he did; the desire need not function as an independent component in the explanation, needed in order to account for the capacity of the cited reason to influence the agent's will." However, the idea that a desire is required in order to bring about a certain disposition of the will may prove tenacious. Such insistence upon there being a desire is, says McDowell, merely a prejudice; it is not warranted either by the phenomenology (pp. 18/19) or by the logical criteria that enter into ascriptions of motives and reasons (pp. 14-17). The idea that a desire is always necessary in the explanation of action no doubt arises, says McDowell, from the idea that the world as it is in itself is 'motivationally inert'. But, says McDowell, the idea of the world as motivationally inert is "not an independent hard datum". It is, he says, "simply the metaphysical counterpart of the thesis that states of will and cognitive states are distinct existences; which is exactly what is in question" (p. 19).

Both the idea that states of will and cognitive states are distinct existences and the metaphysical counterpart to this idea - that the world as it is in itself is value-neutral or motivationally inert - have been considered in the first chapter. However, the following comments may shed a little more light on these issues.

Often, in aesthetic discussions, we say: 'grasp this and you shall see what I mean; look at it like this and the merits will become apparent'⁵⁷. However, it would be mistaken to think that we look in a certain way first and then see the merit, or that seeing the merit is *consequent upon* grasping something else. In a sense - to be clarified - to see the merit and to look in a certain way is one and the same achievement. When someone sees the merit they are sure to be looking in the requisite way, and vice versa. The case is like that in which the pupil learns to go on expanding a series of numbers. We say that the pupil has grasped the principle when he can continue; the pupil's ability to continue in the requisite manner is the criterion of his having grasped the principle. For by the argument of chapter two, section II (pp. 65-67), the pupil's ability to go on *is* his having grasped the principle. The one is not consequent upon the other. Being able to go on, or having grasped the principle, are not different items. By the same token, the criterion of someone's having perceived the merits of an object - i.e., the criterion of someone's understanding of an object - is what he says and does. If someone perceives an object as having the same merits that we perceive it as having then they must share

our conception of it. We can tell if someone has grasped our meaning by attending to how they go on to treat the object, how they express their view, and so on. On this view there can be no separation between the way in which an object is described - i.e., how it is treated and characterized (fine shades of behaviour come into the picture here) - and the way in which it is evaluated. The evaluation is expressed through what is said and what is done; it does not lie behind it. Comments earlier in this chapter, about the actions we suppose appropriate to a stated evaluation, are relevant here.

Perhaps the attempt to bring someone to share your conception of an object may be compared with the attempt to teach someone the meaning of an arithmetical operator. Assume that the pupil already has a practical knowledge of a number of arithmetical functions. By various examples we attempt to impart the meaning of our operator. Likewise, we attempt to impart the sense of our aesthetic view. But isn't there this disanalogy: in the arithmetical case we are imparting a technique, a neutral item of information. But in the aesthetic case we are attempting to influence evaluation, we are attempting to elicit agreement, approval, a similar emotive response. Or is there only apparent disanalogy? In the aesthetic case we are imagining, I suppose, resistance of some sort, a certain stubbornness, a reluctance to comply: our pupil is pitting his evaluation against ours and, like the proverbial horse, though, perhaps, led to the water he cannot be forced to drink. Consider, however, attempting to teach someone

a new method of subtraction, or a new method of long-division. Might there not be some resistance here too? And is the nature of the resistance so terribly different? How do we convince someone that they ought, rationally, to adopt our method of dividing or of subtracting? We could begin by showing that it agreed with theirs in the answers that it gave. But then we should have to argue that, despite the effort involved in changing from one system to another, the new system is worth the bother, because it is simpler, faster, more accurate (more user-friendly), and so forth. We might render the new technique more attractive by relating it to other mathematical techniques, and so on. It seems to me that this is not so far from the case where we attempt to convince someone that a poem is ironic, or that a novel, which they are inclined to dislike, is really worth reading. The nature of the resistance is, I think, the same in each case. And the arguments put forward are, in each case, very similar. But perhaps, though, there are differences elsewhere.

We could say, then, that an evaluation drags along with it, so to speak, a certain conception of the object. The evaluation is *bound up with* certain ways of looking, with an attention to this feature rather than that, with dispositions to use, in argument or in description of the object, this analogy rather than that, this image rather than that, and so on. The point is: how do we discover what someone's conception is? The answer is that we look at what they say and do - for what they say and do is a *criterion* of how they conceive of a thing. There is no independent mode of

access to an evaluation apart from these details of behaviour. We frequently imagine, however, that we detect two things: on the one hand a perception of the object and on the other an attitude towards the object. And when we cannot see how the attitude is related to a (notional) value-free perception of the object we imagine the attitude to float free of the object. But whence comes the idea that there are two things here?

So the evaluation and the conception of the object are inseparable - this is a logical point. But doesn't this merely shift the emphasis of the scepticism? Isn't it mincing words to talk of the conception and the evaluation being inseparable? If they are inseparable then scepticism may be expressed about whether any conception of an object is better than another and whether it is possible to discuss rationally different conceptions.

The first point to be made here is that there can be no absolute judge of whether one conception is to be preferred to another. Therefore, the authority to be sought is not the authority of a definitive view of things. The second point is that our ways of conceiving of things are malleable. It is easy to maintain that an *emotion* drifts free of reasons/rational constraints. And it is easy to maintain that nothing - save perhaps certain contingencies of nature - secures emotional responses. But it is less easy to maintain that a *conception of an object*, which we express by means of certain metaphors, descriptions, evaluations, and the like, is not open to rational

appraisal, particularly if by 'rational appraisal' we mean a process by means of which a conception may be overhauled, re-located (in a larger conception of things), supported, consolidated, and so on. Such a process is undoubtedly a form of appraisal; it is rational just in so far as it proceeds along rails laid down by a community, by rules sanctioned and recognized by a community, and in a manner recognized as valid by members of a community. Rational appraisal of anything, from mathematical theorems to ideas of science, may be described as just such a process... (Our entire way of seeing, that is our whole way of proceeding, our grasp of the sense of our activities, the system of representations that we make for ourselves, is forever subject to influence and modification. Often, the paradigm case of conceptual change is taken to be the adoption or rejection of a belief, i.e., an empirically testable proposition. But there are other forms of conceptual change - think, for example, of coming to see the sense of a particular moral outlook, such that it begins to exert an influence and to make claims that, increasingly, call for recognition. Or think of coming to see (understand) the relation between different areas of mathematics, e.g., between integral and differential calculus. Are these changes best characterized as changes in belief? My understanding is certainly different - I can do now what before I could not do. But is this difference due to a new belief? (The idea of non-propositional knowledge holds forth the possibility of rationality in aesthetics, since the ways in which such knowledge may be gained, and shaped, and communicated, may correspond to procedures found in aesthetics. If it is allowed

that a shift in a point of view may be a part of rationality - some shifts are better than others, more complete, and for better reasons, etc - then aesthetics, which involves so many such shifts, may be brought into the fold of rational activities. See the following paragraphs on this.))

We might say that an object *licenses* an interpretation/evaluation. Whether an interpretation is licensed by the object will be determined by whether members of a community can see the justice in the interpretation. That is, they may not agree with the interpretation but they recognize its claims to validity. An object may license many interpretations, like a figure that may be seen as many things, but some will be more defensible than others, which is to say that they will be more easily construed by members of a community as one rather than the other. Herein lies the basis of the rationality of aesthetics, as well as an account of what grounds reasons in aesthetics, and how changes in aesthetic outlook are brought about.

But the question may now arise: how is a world-view, or a system of values, established? How do we come by our values in the first place? The preceeding discussion has relied upon there being a more or less common pool of values - but what guarantees this? Is the basis for agreement biological? How could it be anything else? For the idea that values could be taught seems somewhat strange. How in such a case could consent be gained for the values of the community? These questions bear, of course, on the issue of

how one person gains the consent of another to his point of view, how value-systems can be altered, fundamentally changed, tinkered with, tilted slightly to this side or that. This is the question that, at this stage, most troubles the sceptic: how do reasons work in aesthetics? How can we marshal, by rational means, a point of view, an emotional response? The answer is that emotional responses, being tied up with beliefs and non-propositional points-of-view, are malleable just to the extent that beliefs and points-of-view are malleable. The emotive response to an object is not inaccessible - it finds expression in certain metaphors, inclinations, etc - and these can be realigned, tampered with, overhauled, in short influenced in a hundred ways. How, then, is someone brought to share the world-view of a community? How are we brought to value things (for it is a strange fact that people of the same culture are unanimous in holding certain values, say of propriety or of what is fashionable...)? How is it that a disposition of the will can be grabbed hold of and given a particular direction? Is it all psychological trickery?

Surely the world-view (and by 'world-view' I mean a conception of the world that is steeped in value, a conception that is expressed in the disposition to value in certain ways) is absorbed throughout childhood in the way that, for example, etiquette and manners are absorbed. Although we can put aside the manners that we are taught as children we nonetheless carry with us a sense of propriety that derives from our early environment. We learn (good) behaviour already charged with value, we learn it

along with expressions of approval or disapproval, it is woven into a context of value. Of course we can accept that other peoples go about things differently, and we do not necessarily suppose our own customs to be superior to all others, but we nevertheless find our own traditions more congenial than others (it is no objection to this to point to those who react against the customs abroad in their own social milieu - sometimes such people believe that they perceive the *spirit* of their customs not in their own society but in another society. Thus might someone say that the spirit of British fair play no longer survives in Britain but is to be observed more clearly amongst certain other nations or groups of people.). The world-view is *imbibed* from an early age. It is not argued for, it is not imposed, it is not grafted onto a value-neutral view of the world. It is introduced as a first framework, complete with value. (Think of the practice of using money. The *idea* of money - how it is used - is not communicated apart from a conception of the *value* of money. What money is worth, the place that it should occupy in life - rather than just what money can obtain for you - is learned along with the institution itself. We could, for example, imagine someone writing, in an autobiography, something along the following lines: 'I first became aware of money as something that could cause great rows in the household and as a commodity which had associated with it all sorts of dangers and responsibilities...' And is this not a fairly good description of what money means for us - even if it is not the first definition of money that springs to mind?) We may obtain an insight into how values are imparted by looking at an activity wholly concerned with

the inculcation of a specific way of living and behaving. Such an insight is afforded by the activity of religious instruction.

The religious teacher (in the sense of the guru rather than the possibly secular religious education teacher) practices a consistent (and constant) influence on the thoughts of the student. He is always there to offer the religious perspective. He says: look at the circumstance like this; here is the way in which it should be viewed; the response should be this...; etc. And, by and by, the student grasps the sense of the religious view. He 'gets the hang of it'. (Little by little his spiritual centre-of-gravity shifts - he pours himself, amoeba-like, from one stance into another.) (Although the student may be relied upon to proceed correctly for the most part, he requires occasional topping up. Consider the role of religious teachers in most societies: they expose the populace to religious ideas on a regular basis, and seek to impart a sense of value that will correct any false conceptions. For this reason, it is a mistake to think of religious teachers as preaching to the converted, or of congregations as self-reinforcing groups telling one another what they already know and want to hear. Rather, they receive a regular infusion of new blood, a challenge to faith - for they may not have grasped central ideas correctly - thus worship and instruction ought to be a testing, a challenge, not a complacent activity.) But what does 'getting the hang of it' involve? Once again the central passages of the *Investigations* are relevant. The discussion there concerns, in part, what it is to get the hang of a rule, e.g., the rule governing the expansion of

'+2'. Wittgenstein's conclusion may be said to be that 'getting the hang' of a rule is none other than being able to perform the requisite operations or actions. Getting the hang of the operation '+2', for example, is not a question of grasping *something else*, upon which the grasp of the meaning of '+2' depends. The ability to go on after a certain process of training or instruction is, so Wittgenstein might have said, the given. It is basic and unanalysable.

So, when we grasp the new perspective we come to see the world in certain terms. It is useful here to think of learning certain skills - think of learning the meaning of a religious concept, e.g., the Christian concept of mercy, or humility, or forgiveness. We are taught over a long period, by means of countless examples, what these concepts mean, i.e., how they are deployed in life. We come to cut the world at certain joints, that is, we come to classify things in a distinctive manner as a matter of course, without going through an elaborate procedure of interpretation...Instances of shifting stance abound. When, as children, we cease to view our parents as the centre of the universe we change stance (we do not necessarily place our parents at the centre because of empirical beliefs - they simply occupy this position *on faith*). When, at various times in life, we cast ourselves in different roles, formulate different self-images...we are all the time adopting different perspectives, which alter the way in which we behave.

How are these considerations related to aesthetics? I am born into a culture, which is to say a distinctive way of looking at the world. I absorb this way of looking in countless small ways: I am steeped in a way of looking at the world from an early age. I learn emotional responses along with this way of seeing (that I exhibit the correct emotional responses is part and parcel of having mastered the distinctive way of seeing). The way in which I absorb an aesthetic outlook is like the way in which I might absorb a certain moral outlook, e.g., Christianity.

There is, then, as much scope in aesthetics for argument, for person-to-person communication and reciprocal influence, as in any other activity. Herein lies the rationality of aesthetics.

Conclusion.

In conclusion a few loose ends may be tied up. One outstanding doubt may have to do with the fact that little has been said about the nature of the rationality involved in aesthetics. A question might arise, therefore, along the following lines: How is the case where someone is brought to view an object differently by what I have called psychological trickery (as a limiting case we might take hypnotic suggestion) to be distinguished from the case where someone has good reason to adopt a different point of view? In other words, what, on this account, constitutes a good reason? Where is the line to be drawn between presenting persuasive metaphors, analogies, parallels, images, and the like - which I have said (pp. 102/103) is to be counted a rational procedure - and presenting an attractive but ultimately inadmissible case? After all, might they not alter their views in the way that we want but for the wrong reasons, e.g., because they admire, and wish to emulate, us?

An answer to this question may be approached via the example of the student mathematician. What leads us to call the method or process by which the student comes to proceed differently rational? Or, when we teach anyone a new technique, what leads us to call their progress rational? Isn't it just that their coming to proceed in the way required is a mark of rationality - they have acquired mastery of a rational procedure? The question of how they arrived at their mastery of the technique is not to the point:

whether they relate the new technique to techniques that they know already, or whether they visualize outlandish things, or whether they go through a process unfathomable to us, the conclusion is the same, namely, that they have followed a rational procedure. For the only way in which a procedure can be counted non-rational is if it does not deliver the goods, if it leads to an inability to go on in the requisite manner. (And even here we can imagine errors that look to be the result of rational procedures and errors that defy analysis.)

Transferring this conclusion to the aesthetic case, we arrive at the view that someone changes their evaluation on rationally-defensible grounds if they can give a proper account of the aesthetic view to which they have been converted. If they cannot then they have grasped the wrong end of the stick, have adopted a view that they do not understand. Thus, if someone cultivates (perhaps it is more correct to say 'affects') a liking for a particular poet, say, because someone whom they admire and wish to emulate likes the poet then we can say that they will not be able to replicate the understanding manifested by the person whom they admire. They do not arrive at an appreciation of the poet through the wrong avenues - rather, they do not arrive at an appreciation of the poet at all. Likewise, he who is induced, hypnotically, to like a certain poet will in all likelihood not be able to give adequate reasons for his enthusiasm. (There could be difficulties here, since people will often rationalize those things that, due to hypnotism, they are obliged to do. Thus, someone who has been

directed to open a window will explain their actions by saying that the room is stuffy, and so on. The question is whether someone who rationalizes a liking for something can give a good account of their reasons for liking it. I suspect that in such a case we should think someone's reasons somewhat spurious or ill-considered - as we might when, in the case of the window, someone says, against all evidence, that a cool, airy room is stuffy and needs ventilation...) On this view the end-product of aesthetic instruction/discussion is not to be described as a liking for this or that feature of the world or of an object - it is a conception of the world or of an object, such that it cannot be imparted by the wrong means - its being imparted is everything. (See, in this connection, John McDowell's arguments in "virtue and Reason", *The Monist*, 62, No. 3).

Another question that might be raised is how the idea of shared responses (responses that everyone could share in theory if not in practice) lends aesthetics more objectivity or rationality. Surely sheer weight of numbers cannot secure rationality? Whether one person or a community of people exhibits a certain response makes no difference to the non-cognitive nature of the response. Here, in reply, it might be appropriate to ask in return what, other than the actual responses of people, might secure the rational. Isn't what is rational and irrational determined by the standards of a community? The very idea of rationality, or objectivity, is tied to human agreement, for human agreement it is that decides what is rational and what is not, what is objective

and what is not. The later work of Wittgenstein, which has featured in places in this essay, is relevant here. The question: how does shifting the emphasis of the discussion from the response of the individual to the response of a community help to secure the rationality and/or objectivity of aesthetics? could be read as seeking a justification of those procedures that the entire community recognizes as valid. However, an idea that is familiar from the work of Wittgenstein is that the practices of the community cannot be given an external justification - nor do they require one. They cannot be given a justification since we could just as well inquire what sanctions our acceptance of any such justification. When can we be sure that we have an ultimate justification? That is to say that anything that might pass muster as a justification of our ways of proceeding must itself be subjected to our standards of validity, and it is these that are in question. The practices of the community do not require a justification because they stand as what is given. Their 'justification' is that they work, which is to say that they do not jar with, come into conflict with, the rest of our activities. Our practices do not aim to reflect a super-sensible, or absolute, reality. Our practices simply are. Says Wittgenstein: "What has to be accepted, the given, is - so one could say - *forms of life*." (*Philosophical Investigations*, p.226).

As for the scraps of common wisdom with which, in chapter one, I started: often the effect of these statements is to foreclose upon aesthetic discussion, to kill off argument and

thought, to suggest that nothing is gained by studying aesthetic objects. The appreciation of aesthetic objects becomes a solipsistic activity. Aesthetic discussion emerges, at best, as a sort of experience-sharing, like the disclosure of childhood memories that others might recognize but cannot share. However, I hope to have shown that some of the views that inform these ideas are questionable, and that aesthetic discussion, far from being a statement, simply, of likes and dislikes, is a reasonable activity, sensitive to all sorts of considerations. Consequently, I hope, too, that in the course of the essay some idea has emerged of why aesthetic discussion is worthwhile. It is undoubtedly true that aesthetics does not allow proof of the sort found in mathematics - but herein lies its interest. It is open-ended, always amenable to alteration, extension, interpretation. And while this is sometimes true also of areas of science (for in science there can be discovery, interpretation of data, extension of theory, and so forth) the possibility of synthesis, of fresh discovery, increased understanding, and the like, is the greater in a conceptual activity such as aesthetics. Scientific inquiry may allow us to better manipulate our material environment, but just because aesthetics (or, indeed, any conceptual inquiry) does not deliver these tangible examples of progress does not mean to say that it is not worthwhile or is not profitably engaged in.

Footnotes.

1. This sounds rather mild, as though the only response to scepticism of this sort is to throw up the hands in horror, and to appeal to the sceptic to do the same. But the point is a little sharper than that. It is that a far-reaching scepticism may ultimately cease to make sense, and may prove to be self-refuting.

2. I wouldn't want to say here whether in the end all these views ought to be dismissed as expressions of one metaphysical prejudice, or whether to advert to one view in support of another could ever be other than question-begging. However, the fact that the argument from queerness (of which more later) can be rendered in ontological and epistemological versions suggests that one metaphysical view unites these issues.

3. Says Hume: "Euclid has fully explained all the qualities of the circle; but has not in any proposition said a word of its beauty. The reason is evident. The beauty is not a quality of the circle. It lies not in any part of the line, whose parts are equally distant from a common centre. It is only the effect which that figure produces upon the mind, whose peculiar fabric of structure renders it susceptible of such sentiments. In vain would you look for it in the circle, or seek it, either by your senses or by mathematical reasoning, in all the properties of that figure." (*An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, p.291/292.)

4. On this view the judgement is isolated from any other factors that might be operative in the agent's motivational structure. The agent is pictured as having preferences all of which are insulated from one another: there is no logical relation between an interest in, say, Shakespeare and an interest in, say, Picasso or Jazz or *Citizen Kane* or any other sphere of human life. (It is this that the metaphors of the needle-thin aesthetic agent and of the lightning-like aesthetic judgement are intended to convey. The aesthetic agent's judgements are pictured as having the selectivity and particularity of the sharp needle, which can probe a small area without disturbing anything round about. The lightning-like judgement is, like lightning, not to be explained, and strikes apparently arbitrarily...) Thus, an interest in Shakespeare can appear to have no relation to any other interests, and so cannot be supported or challenged by reference to any other interests. Scope for rational manoeuvre is restricted. But I should argue, on the contrary, that the aesthetic judgement - to use an excellent phrase of David Wiggins' - 'fans out into a whole aborescence of concerns'. The judgement is answerable to these concerns and these concerns provide a foothold for argument. This idea is prominent in the second and third chapters of this essay.

5. Compare the following comments by Basil Ashmore on the subject of Beethoven and his critics: "While 19th Century writers tended to grow moist-eyed over Beethoven's misfortunes and refused to paint him 'warts and all', many 20th Century commentators have reacted so strongly to the warts that one wonders how a man whom Ernest Newman

described as being merely 'arrogant, boorish, unethical, unspiritual and undignified' could possibly have created some of the noblest art of all time!" Of course, the point is blunted somewhat if the critic regards the music as consonant with the character of the composer.

6. Though, to be sure, even these have, like moral philosophy, sometimes sought to adopt a 'scientific approach', to introduce impartiality, and to refrain from making specific value-judgements. (This is not to say, though, that such scholarship should aim to endorse what John McDowell has criticized as 'the mildly comical idea that the subject-matter of aesthetics is a set of judgements in which objects are explicitly appraised, ranked, or evaluated'. *Aesthetic Value, Objectivity, and the Fabric of the World*. p.2.)

7. It might seem that the existence of what might be called 'culinary arts' - wine-tasting, haute cuisine, and the like - constitutes an objection of sorts here. But it must be remembered that the food-critic does not aspire to the objectivity sought by art criticism: argument is exhausted far quicker and conviction run less deep. Also, there is not the close-knit fabric of reasons and counter-reasons that characterize important aesthetic disputes.

8. There is no contradiction here. There are, after all, no areas of inquiry that do not suffer theoretical revolutions. The possibility of a complete upheaval is no more proof of the

subjectivity of aesthetic judgement than it is proof of the subjectivity of science.

9. It is worth distinguishing here between two senses of objective. The first implies real existence, and is opposed to what is subjective in the sense of fictive, imaginary, illusory. The second implies non-subjectivity, i.e., without subject, which is opposed to what is subjective in the sense of subject-dependent. Thus a headache may be objective in the first sense - it is not illusory - but not objective in the second sense - it depends for its existence upon a subject. (I owe this point to J. Haldane.) In the text I mean 'objective' in the second sense. The case that a certain kind of non-cognitivism tries to drive home is that what is real is to be equated with what is objective in the second sense, i.e., what is independent of any subject. I argue, along with Nagel, McDowell, Wiggins et al., that this conflation is a mistake.

10. See John McDowell, *Aesthetic Value, Objectivity, and the Fabric of the World*, in Schaper (Ed), *Pleasure, Preference, and Value*.

11. It might be objected here that this is only a picture, and that what is important is the law that holds between volume and pressure. However, although it is to the point in some circumstances to give this ratio as an explanation it is really the law that stands in need of explanation. The interesting question

is: what accounts for this mathematical relationship between pressure and volume?

12. It might be said that these are simply popular expressions brought into use in order to characterize, crudely, complex mathematical discoveries. Thus scientists invent humorous names for mathematical constant entering into sub-atomic physics - strangeness, charm, and the rest. But: if the mathematics has no empirical content it is just mathematics. It explains nothing and does not connect with the world at all. The attempt to envisage the meaning of a mathematical science is the attempt to understand the rationale behind a predictive technique.

13. The following illustration may make this point clearer. It is reasonable to suppose that the character of the music composed for different instruments can differ according to the instrument. The form of the instrument will dictate certain aspects of the form of the music. By this I mean not just superficial differences, such as that the range of the piano extends two octaves either side of the range of the guitar; I mean that different instruments will present for exploration different musical possibilities. Imagine, for example, a keyboard instrument where all the natural notes are gathered together on one keyboard while the remaining notes are placed on a keyboard above (i.e., one keyboard contains all the white notes of the conventional piano and the other contains all the black notes). It is feasible that the music for this instrument will differ more or less subtly from music composed for

the conventional piano. (In the same way, different methods of playing the piano may liberate the composer from certain - restrictions.) And, through looking at the score, it may be possible to tell which instrument the music is scored for. The instrument may not exactly stamp the music with its unique seal, but it may lend the music a particular flavour...It is in such a way that I imagine the human perspective to influence the human account of the objective world.

14. And what can be meant by interpretation other than a conception of the mathematics that ties it, if only metaphorically - as in the case of light-waves and sub-atomic *particles* - to the phenomena of everyday? Without interpretation we have a successful theory but no clear idea of what it means *for us*. This state of affairs is what gives rise - as I think David Wiggins points out - to the confusion concerning what it is that a discovery in, say, high-energy physics has shown us, how it has advanced our knowledge...

15. The point here may be clarified if a comparison is made between events (causes and effects) and actions. I am suggesting that the identification of causes and effects, no less than the identification of actions, depends upon the exercise of human categories. The idea that an event may be characterized independently of uniquely human ways of viewing the world is, it seems to me, no more sensible than the idea that an action may be correctly characterized independently of the place that the action

has in human affairs - understood from the human point of view. For an interesting discussion of this issue in the philosophy of action see H.A. Prichard's *Acting, Willing, Desiring* and A.I. Melden's *Willing* (both in A.R. White (ed), *The Philosophy of Action*, O.U.P., Oxford, 1968).

16. For example, a house burns to the ground. If we take the cause as that without which the house would *not* have burned it is not clear that we can confidently exclude anything. The fact that it didn't rain could be construed as a cause. Or the fact that the floor was dry, the rooms stacked with flammable material, the town fire-engines otherwise engaged. All else remaining the same, virtually any circumstance can be construed as contributing to the house burning. If we take the cause to be that which necessitated the burning of the house we shall again be unable to exclude anything, since the cause is a complex of circumstances working together. No single circumstance alone can be identified as *the* cause. It is not implausible to suggest that the cause in any particular case is identified as that which is out of the ordinary, that which marks the situation as unusual. The cause of a fire may in one situation be attributed to the dropping of cigarette-ends (if, say, the fire is in a no-smoking area, e.g., a petrol-station) while in another situation it may be attributed to the presence of flammable material which cigarette-ends have ignited (if the fire is in a smoking area, e.g., a football stadium). The attribution of cause, then, varies according to the situation (just as the attribution of moral responsibility varies).

17. I say 'human life' but this is of course a general observation. The absolute conception of the world is a metaphysical ideal. Perhaps God conceives of the world in this way. Certainly, we could never in that case conceive of a God-like thought - it would mean nothing to us.

18. We can only be persuaded within life as it were. It is incoherent to be persuaded by internal concerns to adopt an external position that effectively denies the validity of the internal concerns. The paradox is tangible.

19. Of course, I have not shown value to be objective in the sense that it stands alongside - and may be investigated by the same means as - physical phenomena. I hope, however, to have shown that the *prima facie* case against value, as presented by the objective conception of the world, is not conclusive, nor is the adoption of the objective view compulsory. The idea that only that which is without a subject may really exist should be held at arm's length - at least for the moment (thus the last sentence in the text reads: "The difficulty is to understand how this 'value-location' is to be achieved").

20. At least on some theories weakness of will is thought of as the phenomenon of a desire overriding the deliverances of reason

21. Except, of course, in the sense that cognition may inform the intelligence of the existence of features of the world that are

relevant to a particular desire, as, for example, the realization that a coconut may be smashed with a stone may arouse the desire for coconut milk.

22. Hume again: "'Tis obvious, that when we have a prospect of pain or pleasure from any object, we feel a consequent emotion of aversion or propensity, and are carry'd to avoid or embrace what will give us this uneasiness or satisfaction" (*Treatise*, p.414).

23. It might be objected that to say that a motivation arises from a desire is not entirely non-explanatory. Perhaps the point in the text needs to be coupled with the observation that aesthetic discussions exhibit a fine rational structure and that this does not sit easily with the idea that it is only necessary to advert to an agent's desire in order to explain his interest in some aesthetic quality. Even if adverting to desires gives an explanation of sorts it does not allow an explanation of the subtlety of aesthetic discussion. (Imagine someone saying that a person's philosophical outlook may be explained by reference to his desires. Unless this statement is considerably elaborated it is woefully inadequate as an account of why someone holds the philosophical views that he does in fact hold.)

24. See Thomas Nagel's comments on prudence in *The Possibility of Altruism*.

25. - *Aesthetic Value, Objectivity, and the Fabric of the World*, p.1.

26. See G.E. Moore's *Wittgenstein's Lectures in 1930-33*: "He said that such a statement as 'That bass moves too much' is not a statement about human beings at all, but is more like a piece of mathematics; and that, if I say of a face which I draw 'it smiles too much', this says that it could be brought closer to some 'ideal', not that it is not yet agreeable enough, and that to bring it closer to the 'ideal' in question would be more like 'solving a mathematical problem'. Similarly, he said, when a painter tries to improve his picture he is not making a psychological experiment on himself, and that to say of a door 'It is top-heavy' is to say what is wrong with it, not what impression it gives you. The question of Aesthetics, he said, was not 'Do you like this?' but 'Why do you like it?'"

27. Recall Wittgenstein's introduction to the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: "I therefore believe myself to have found, on all essential points, the final solution of the problems. And if I am not mistaken in this belief then the second thing in which the value of this work consists is that it shows how little is achieved when these problems are solved."

28. I am aware that the idea of a 'correct' application of aesthetic concepts is not free of problems. Indeed, some may argue that aesthetic concepts, being intricately bound up with emotions,

can only be used by beings susceptible to emotions, and that computers could not therefore use aesthetic concepts at all - at best they could only pretend to use them (or, better, *simulate* the use of them). It is one of the aims of this section of the essay to show that aesthetic concepts can be correctly or incorrectly used...It seems to me that the following considerations are salient in this case: aesthetic discussions, however full of disagreement/contention, are generally intelligible. That is to say that we follow the exchange of views, we understand the points of contention, and we can often say what the dispute hangs upon. It seems to me that this would be impossible were there no rules governing the application of aesthetic concepts (or, as Wittgenstein said, a disagreement requires common ground, a substratum of agreement). An incorrect use of aesthetic concepts would take the discussion off the rails: there could be no discussion.

29. *Aesthetics: An Introduction*. O.U.P. 1987.

30. Even if this is a misconstrual of Sheppard's position the issue is still of interest. For we can still ask: how can we argue about aesthetic judgements, how can we justify them, how can we bring others sometimes to see what we are driving at and at other times to agree with us, and so forth. I.e., how can we account for the rationality of aesthetic discourse when we cannot pin down what the key concepts mean? Is the entire activity of aesthetic appraisal and discussion a fudge?

31. That is to say that aesthetic concepts are governed not by necessary and sufficient conditions but by conditions which *loosely entail* the aesthetic concept. These ideas will be more fully treated in the main text.

32. This accounts for the dissatisfaction I have attributed to Anne Sheppard. Wittgenstein argues against that tendency of which Sheppard offers an example, the tendency to generalize, the tendency to capture phenomena in succinct formulas - and he argues most forcefully against the philosophical superstitions that underlie this tendency.

33. Note that this, and the paragraphs immediately following (to the top of p.55), are largely exegetical, and serve not to argue for Wittgenstein's views, but to place those views in context relevant to the present discussion. Wittgenstein's arguments are put forward on pp. 55-66.

34. I am thinking here of an intention to create a certain effect, or to express a certain mood, or *somesuch*. Thus a poet may have the intention of capturing the significance of swans on a lake but not succeed in the attempt. How does he know he has not succeeded? Because, the argument runs, he feels the disparity between the inner perception and the public expression.

35. The phrase appears, in fact, at *Investigations* 546.

36. I should say here that I am not presuming in what follows to give a summary of the grand scheme of the *Investigations*. I merely seek to bring to the fore the strand of argument therein that seems most suited to my (theoretical and exegetical) purposes.

37. This example is, of course, the same as Wittgenstein's at P.I. 151 and thereabouts. The variations on the game are designed to bring out the parallels between the arithmetical case, the determinate-concept case, and the loose-concept case.

38. John McDowell, "Non-Cognitivism and Rule-Following" in *Wittgenstein: to Follow a Rule*. Also, "Virtue and Reason" in the *Monist*, 62, No.3.

39. I imagine, in fact, that it was such an idea that Wittgenstein was thinking when he talked about a note struck on the keyboard of the imagination and about understanding language as being more like understanding music than is commonly supposed. These ideas, it should be noted, further decrease the distance between aesthetic phenomena and the phenomena that are usually placed in opposition to them.

40. "It is the mark of the educated man to look for precision in each class of things just so far as the nature of the subject admits". *Nicomachean Ethics*, I. 3.

41. We could say that *The Sun* secures, or stands guard over, the sense of a certain distinction - that between biased reporting and relatively unbiased reporting. Perhaps it marks one stage along a continuum from what we call objective reporting, which news-services presumably seek to exemplify, to what we call blatant propaganda. Thus, if someone asked if *The Sun* were an example of blatant propaganda we might deny *that* term, and produce an example of true propaganda, e.g., party-political broadcasts, the literature of fanatical pressure-groups, and the like. And we can, by means of many examples (the use of which Anne Sheppard deplored), illustrate the fine distinctions that we might wish to mark in this area. (Think, for example, of where on the continuum we might place: religious television broadcasts; BBC News reports; Nazi war-films; public-health advertisements; the philosophical works of Hume; the historical works of H.G. Wells; the literary criticism of a Marxist or Freudian thinker; etc.) *The Sun* occupies a fairly determinate and fixed position within the pantheon of exemplars here.

42. This conclusion relates directly to the earlier comments on sense-experience, private language, and the queerness of aesthetic value. For there it was suggested that concepts did not derive directly from sense-experience as a matter of course or of logical deduction. It was suggested that our practice of applying concepts in a particular way was the only fact that secured the meaning of our concepts...Thus, the metaphysical prop taken away, it was

possible to see how aesthetic concepts and sense-experience concepts (concepts in general) were related.

43. In fact this appears to be the sort of view that David Wiggins inclines towards in *Truth, Invention, and the Meaning of Life*. For in a footnote to that essay Wiggins says: "I think that...philosophers have misdescribed the undoubted fact that, because there is no standing interest to which yellowness answers, 'yellow' is not such as to be *cut out* (by virtue of standing what it stands for) to commend a thing or evaluate it favourably. But, surely, if there were such a standing interest, 'yellow' would be at least as well suited to commend as 'sharp' or 'beautiful' or even 'just' are." (p.107). The point here, it seems to me, is that 'yellow' differs from such concepts as 'elegant' not because the one picks out features of the world while the other does not, but because 'yellow' is an indifferent term, because we are in general indifferent to yellowness, whereas we are not in general indifferent to elegance or to other aesthetic qualities - in these cases we have a 'standing interest' to which these concepts answer. The point of philosophical interest becomes on this view what the nature of this standing interest is. (Note, incidentally, that the distinction between colour on the one hand and aesthetic value on the other is not that between the objective or non-relative and the subjective-involving or relative. Colour and value are alike in this respect (see ch. 1). They differ, however, in that the one but not the other is non-evaluative, is independent of the will.)

44. Note the phrase '*essentially unconstrained*'. The non-cognitivist might argue that affective responses are intentional, involving a conception of their object, and are therefore constrained in terms of intelligibility. It does not make sense, for example, to be terrified of a grain of sugar (unless, of course, there are circumstances under which a grain of sugar is lethal - perhaps to someone who has imbibed a substance which is fatal if combined with the slightest trace of sugar - but this is to bring in various supporting considerations). The non-cognitivist will argue, however, that the entire complex of attitudes that frame a particular affective response is cognitively unconstrained, hence *essentially unconstrained*. It is the development of precisely this line of argument, and its implications, that this chapter is concerned with.

45. Suppose someone were to point to a part of the Tay Rail Bridge, e.g., criss-crossing metal struts between the legs of the bridge, and suggest that these are elegant. We should first of all consider whether there is any ground for saying that these are elegant - we might initially say that, yes, they are surprisingly delicate, and do lend a certain sinuousness to parts of the bridge, etc - and then we might begin the business of honing down this description. But in another context we should be more ready to challenge the ascription of elegance to an object - not because the object is even less likely than the Tay Rail Bridge to be elegant but because the object is more easily construed as elegant. In the case of the bridge we are content merely to know how on earth the

concept 'elegant' applies. But in the case of an object such as a wine-glass we are concerned to argue the finer points of meaning.

46. Similarly, someone who pronounces a set of wine-glasses elegant, and then proceeds to mistreat it, lock it away from sight, attempt to pass it on to friends, is not applying 'elegant' correctly - their behaviour betrays, surely, that they mean something more like 'ugly' or 'crass' or somesuch.

47. It might be worth noting here that there is more to someone's grasping a concept than their using it in a way that we could endorse - or, rather, the ways in which they may use the concept correctly are quite numerous. For example, if someone calls the Tay Rail Bridge elegant, and sticks to this view, we shall want to see what sort of discussion they enter into: are they using the concept like an aesthetic concept, are they placing it within a context of argument that suits an aesthetic concept, and so on. We may not grasp what someone means by a concept but we may understand what kind of concept is being used. It is not only by applying a concept to an unexpected object that someone indicates their failure to understand - after all, someone could use a concept in an unorthodox way in order to make a point and highlight aspects of an issue usually overlooked.

48. But here we encounter the artificiality of the issue. Is it plausible to suggest that we should be asked to identify the most elegant between the Golden Gate Bridge and a wine-glass? Are they

commensurable? We can easily imagine the comparison between the Golden Gate and the Tay Rail Bridge. We should say something like: if I had to look at a bridge from my window every morning I should prefer it to be the Golden Gate rather than the Tay Rail Bridge. (And here, perhaps, is the cue for another issue: why are we interested in the one bridge rather than the other? Is there any reason why we should prefer one bridge to the other?) But would we say: if I had to look at something over my bowl of cereal I should prefer it to be a wine-glass rather than the Golden Gate? This, it seems to me, is a bit like asking which of an alligator or a whale is most like a spider - unless there's a riddle here there is no answer.

49. It is questionable, though, whether this prominence is not a distortion of the true state of affairs. Aesthetic discussions are seldom discussions of simple merit. We may think long and hard - and aesthetically - about an object without considering whether or not we *like it*. Our interest in an aesthetic object may be due to many different factors, and to say simply that I must like those objects that I find interesting for one reason or another is like saying that I do the things I do because I generally want to, or desire to do them. This is either false, or it is a truism. It might seem a banal question to ask: do you *like* this sonnet of Shakespeare's? 'Like' is not quite the word required here. Which is to say that the reasons behind someone's interest in or concern with a Shakespearean sonnet preclude the adequacy of 'like'. If someone says, for example, 'you like Philosophy, then?', the answer

'yes' is somewhat lame - if you 'like' Philosophy it is for a reason - and the relation between Philosophy and your interest in it is not captured by the relation described by 'like'.

50. The phrase derives from John McDowell, in *Is Morality a System of Hypothetical Imperatives?* (PAS Supp. Vol. LII 1978, pp. 13-29.)

51. It is instructive to compare this case with the case of, say, a philosophical dispute. There the supposition tends to be that there is an answer to be had, that there is a final account - a truth - of the matter. A philosophical dispute may remain unresolved but this will be due to exhaustion or lack of time or loss of interest, etc. I.e., the impasse is due to sociological or psychological/practical factors, not logical factors. So whereas disagreement is rationally acceptable in an aesthetic dispute it is not so acceptable in a philosophical dispute...The dispute in aesthetics, however, is rationally acceptable only once the issue has been scrutinized and the best efforts have been made to reconcile opposing views.

52. I say 'some strange reason' here not to be disparaging but to indicate that the connection is supposed to be quite unfathomable. Perhaps there is a contingent psychological connection - at any rate the connection is not one mediated by reason.

53. These seem questions of practical function, but they are related to the entire experience of wine-consumption; moreover, some of the arguments I will give will concentrate upon what is appropriate in the light of the function and nature of wine. Note, incidentally, that here is another example of the way in which aesthetic disputes range over a large area and cannot be confined to a small compass.

54. The idea that various strategems are used to change someone's point of view is reminiscent of the kind of philosophy that Wittgenstein claimed to practice. In philosophy, said Wittgenstein, there is no single method, but a variety of methods, reminders to a particular purpose, cures for particular ailments.

55. *Is Morality a System of Hypothetical Imperatives?* in PAS supp. vol. LII 1978, pp. 13-29.

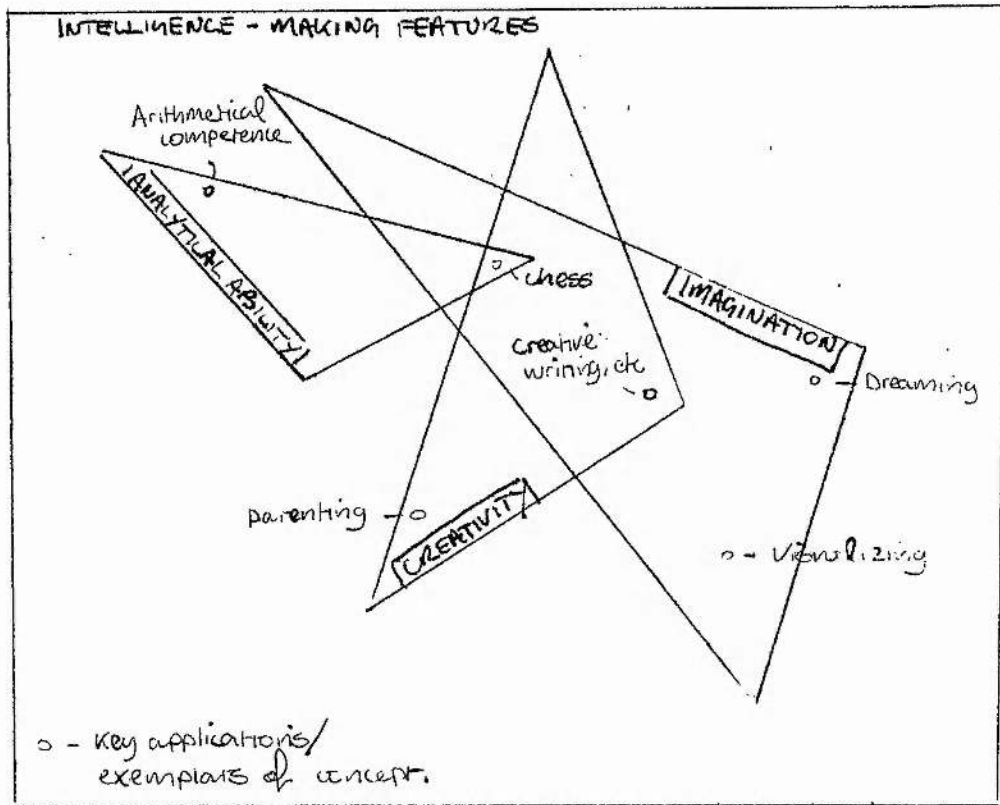
56. McDowell characterizes the general sceptical position thus:

A view of how things are is a state or disposition of one's cognitive equipment. But the psychological state we are considering are to suffice, on their own, to show how certain actions appeared in a favourable light. That requires that their possession entails a disposition of the possessor's will. And will and belief - the appetitive and the cognitive - are distinct existences; so a state which presents itself as cognitive but entails an appetitive state must be, after

all, only impurely cognitive, and contain the appetitive state as a part. If such a state strikes its possessor as cognitive, that is because he is projecting his states of will on to the world (a case of the mind's propensity to spread itself upon objects). The appetitive state should be capable in principle of being analysed out, leaving a neutrally cognitive residue... (p.18).

57. See Wittgenstein's comments on this as recorded by G.E. Moore in *Wittgenstein's Lectures in 1930-33*, in *Mind* 1955.

APPENDIX I.*



* Note that Wittgenstein's rope-metaphor covers the same ground - this may be considered a diagrammatical expression of the same idea. The concepts in the intelligence-clique are associated not in virtue of a bond that runs through all - they do not all overlap on the same point - but through a pattern of overlappings - fibre on fibre, as Wittgenstein says.

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